THE 'GOOD' MOTHER?

THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITIES AMONG NEW MOTHERS IN MALAYSIA

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CA	Conversation analysis
CAL	Centre for Applied Linguistics (The University of Warwick)
CDA	Critical discourse analysis
CfP	Call for participants
CMC	Computer-mediated communication
DA	Discourse analysis
FPDA	Feminist Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis
KL	Kuala Lumpur
PPD	Post-partum depression
PT	Positioning theory
RQ	Research question
SAHM	Stay-at-home mother
SNS	Social networking sites
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
WAHM	Work-at-home mother
WM	Working mother

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious the Most Merciful.

This thesis is dedicated to Zawiyah Ali, the epitome of a 'good' mother.

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DECLARATION

I confirm that this thesis is my own work and that it has not been submitted elsewhere for another degree or qualification.

Norazrin Zamri

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the ways selected new mothers in Malaysia discursively construct their different, sometimes competing, identities in discussion of their beliefs and practices regarding motherhood in research interviews and on social media platforms.

This qualitative study draws on Baxter's (2007) Feminist Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis, Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) sociocultural linguistic principles of identity construction, and Schippers' (2007) concept of hegemonic femininities as its theoretical and analytical framework. The main data were obtained from individual interviews (about 32 hours' worth of recording) with nineteen Malaysian women, who had children under five years, conducted in 2016. These data were supplemented with six months' worth of the participants' motherhood-related Facebook and/or Instagram posts which were published within the same year. The participants were selected from various demographic backgrounds with diverse career roles, ethnicities and religions.

Findings show that the ways the participants construct their identities are intricately complex. Identity construction is often intertwined with various pervasive factors such as career decisions, and heterogeneous ethnic and religious backgrounds. When expressing their ambivalent beliefs and experiences of motherhood, the participants often orient to, reinforce, challenge and negotiate multiple interrelated emergent discourses that are frequently inextricably linked with the notion of the ''good' mother'. The women's multifarious accounts of 'good' mothering thus reflect identity struggles in which they are orienting to and trying to combine the sometimes opposing temporal, sociocultural, career-related, ethnicity-related and religious aspects that are associated with being a 'good' mother in Malaysia. The diverse textual data sources and analytical approach used in this study also contribute to a more comprehensive theoretical understanding of how identities are discursively constructed and analysed.

Keywords: Discursive identity construction, motherhood discourses, social media discourses

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

> We face multiple challenges in our changing world, but one factor remains constant: the timeless importance of mothers and their invaluable contribution to raising the next generation.
>
> (Ban, 2009).

This quotation taken from UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's speech for the International Day of Families signifies the crucial role of a mother across societies and temporal realms. However, although the statement above may arguably be regarded as universally relevant, the notion of motherhood is actually far more complex, especially when it involves the questions of 'what is a 'good' mother?' This question hints at the "contested terrain of motherhood" (Smyth, 2012, p. 1) and the inevitable need of mothers to construct and negotiate their identities (McMahon, 1995). This critically affects the ways new mothers perceive themselves and others (Goodwin & Huppatz, 2010).

The complex identities in motherhood, nevertheless, are largely unknown to many people, as mothers are typically depicted in simplistic ways, for example, as selfless beings who have innate mothering abilities (Goodwin & Huppatz, 2010; Smyth, 2012; Wall, 2013). More specifically, many new mothers are burdened by societal myths surrounding motherhood, particularly discourses through which they are judged as 'good' or 'bad' mothers (Abrams & Curran, 2010; Bhopal, 1998; Choi, Henshaw, Baker & Tree, 2005; Weaver & Ussher, 1997). To clarify, I would operationalise the term 'new mothers' in this study as female heteronormative parents between the ages of 15 to 40 whose children are five years old or younger, during the research period. This means that the participants in this study are not necessarily first-time mothers (see section 3.6 for further justifications).

While previous research has identified a discrepancy between the expectations of motherhood and the realities, and the distress this can cause new mothers, most studies only focus on psychological aspects of motherhood in 'Western' contexts, i.e. in Australasia, Europe and North America (Austin & Carpenter, 2008; Ellece, 2012;

McDaniel, Coyne & Holmes, 2011) and largely ignore the crucial and interrelated roles of identity, discourse and linguistic detail in other relevant socio-cultural contexts. Following the 'discursive' and 'postmodern' turn in the theorisation of identities, these overlooked elements are regarded as fundamental in understanding how people construct and negotiate their identities (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). Likewise, in understanding the intricacies involved in the ways identities are constructed, particularly among new mothers, it is necessary to unpack the processes through a discourse analytical lens.

In recent years, social networking sites (SNSs) have offered mothers numerous convenient platforms to express their experiences and beliefs of motherhood publicly. For these mothers, SNSs, such as Facebook and Instagram, have become an important social variable where physical (the 'offline' self) and virtual (the 'online' self) worlds are psychologically connected and are essentially a projection of their identities (Hongladarom, 2011; Rettberg, 2009). Through SNSs, more widely known as social media, mothers engage in complex expressions of identity, using a range of discursive strategies (Chittenden, 2010). Social media have, in fact, progressively become a powerful avenue for explicitly and implicitly articulating questions related to the ''good' mother' which, as stated previously, signifies a point of concern within and amongst mothers (Kaufmann & Buckner, 2014). Many new mothers, in particular, increasingly prefer to use social media for information and emotional connections because their features promote a sense of community (Kaufmann & Buckner, 2014; McDaniel et al., 2011). Social media, therefore, are seen as a critical site for identity construction in motherhood. For these reasons, it is unsurprising that mothers in North America, for example, have emerged as one of the top groups using social media, with 88% of them using a variety of social media platforms (DeCesare, 2016).

This study aims to investigate discursive construction of identities among new mothers within the under-studied social context of Malaysia. This study's research context is timely since the annual Global Digital Report reveals that Malaysia is frequently ranked as one of the highest SNS-using countries in Asia in recent years (Kemp, 2018). Apart from the fact the I am Malaysian, the heterogeneous demographics in Malaysia (which are explained later in this chapter and in Chapter 2), moreover, also support my decision to focus on new mothers from this nation, since diversity in

socioeconomic and sociocultural contexts is important in sociolinguistic research (Ball, 2010). The possibly different motherhood experiences, beliefs and struggles that accompany Malaysian new mothers from diverse backgrounds, hence, call for research that explores their identity construction processes in verbal as well as social media interactions from a discourse analytical perspective.

1.2 Motivations for the research

Becoming a mother arguably marks a defining moment with regard to identity construction among women (Fein, 1976, as cited in Burke & Stets, 2009). It is, therefore, unsurprising that the transition into motherhood is regarded as a significant milestone in a woman's life. This period, nevertheless, is typically filled with a myriad of challenges (Nielsen, 2015). Motherhood can be a source of extreme stress, anxiety and depression which can have long-term effects on both the mother and the children (Archer & Kao, 2018). Many new mothers, furthermore, report that their actual mothering experiences are very challenging, contrary to the idealised image of motherhood (Austin & Carpenter, 2008; Choi et al., 2005; Laney, Carruthers, Hall & Anderson, 2013; Liamputtong, Yimyam, Parisunyakul, Baosoung, & Sansiriphun, 2004; Weaver & Ussher, 1997). Moreover, Bhopal (1998) argues that it is through this social construction of motherhood that women are judged as 'good' or 'bad' mothers. The possible pressures that come from such normative standards make many mothers feel inadequate and lead to various conflicts in relation to their identities (Weaver & Ussher, 1997).

In recent years, new mothers have begun to portray their identities in a variety of different ways. As stated in the previous section, one of the differences and, arguably, additional challenges, has been brought about by their active use of social media. This is a valid observation since a study in the United States (US) claims that mothers with children under five years are more active on social media than the general public (Strange, 2013) and GlobalWebIndex reports that mothers in the United Kingdom (UK) spend two hours and twelve minutes on social media each day on average (as cited in Stewart, 2018). The culture of sharing thoughts and experiences continues to be a part of some mothers' lives and such active discursive activity indeed does not exist without some struggles in identity construction. Social media platforms, ideally,

can provide a supportive site for individuals to share their happiness and hardships in daily mothering experiences (Cole, 2009, as cited in Nielsen, 2015). In doing so, however, social media may also simultaneously add a new dimension of conflict, since mothers are constantly exposed to idealised and competing expectations of motherhood online (Ross, 2013). In effect, a supposedly supportive platform could become a source of stress for some mothers. Such possible pressure is widespread especially among those who are new to motherhood and who are exposed to many controversial mothering issues (Nielsen, 2015; Ross, 2013). Eventually, some new mothers may succumb to such pressure and face psychological and emotional health problems (Abrams & Curran, 2010; Hwa-Froelich, Loveland Cook & Flick, 2008). Despite these claims, existing empirical studies of motherhood do not consider the circumstances faced by mothers from cultures other than the dominant Australasian, European and North American contexts (Bhopal, 1998). There is, hence, a dire need to study this phenomenon beyond such dominant perspectives to contribute towards more nuanced understanding of identity construction in diverse social and interactional contexts.

It must also be noted that new mothers construct and negotiate their identities in offline and online communication via discourses (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). The types of discourses and ways they are produced, nonetheless, can be complex and clashing and, thus, may lead to a myriad of conflicts in relation to the mothers' identities (Ross, 2013). Such challenges clearly do not aid productive communication that new mothers need. Within the heterogeneous cultural communities in Malaysia, the possibly incongruent mothering beliefs and practices that new mothers with diverse demographic backgrounds express may significantly impact their lives, families and societies at large. The distinctive sociocultural and linguistic landscapes of Malaysia will be explicated in the following section. Essentially, I believe that analysing the interactions of new Malaysian mothers from a linguistic and discursive perspective will generate more meaningful insights on the ways mothers discursively construct their identities. The apparent absence of a linguistic and discursive approach to understanding identity construction, and the negotiation of identities in such a culturally diverse population, has validated my initial personal motivation for exploring this topic.

This research was initially motivated by my own ambivalent mothering experiences in raising my two young children and navigating the expectations related to being a mother. My struggles after giving birth to my second son, during which I experienced the 'double' challenge of dealing with two children who frequently suffered from serious respiratory problems (to the point of countless hospitalisations), have been the driving force behind this research. In such trying circumstances, I often received an influx of unsolicited remarks about my mothering practices which made me feel like I was not a 'good' mother. Furthermore, my Facebook page, of which I am an active user, has always been inundated with conflicting ideals of 'good' motherhood by other users, further aggravating my sense of inadequacy as a mother. After three years of motherhood, and after ongoing observations and communication with other new mothers, I gradually noticed that I was not the only mother who faced such feelings of failure, even while our specific challenges might have been distinctive. Since then, I have been personally, socially and academically invested in researching this topic in order to unpack the complexities involved in the discursive construction and negotiation of identities among new mothers in face-to-face as well as virtual communication. In short, my position as a mother who had relatively challenging motherhood experiences has critically precipitated the conception and aims of this research. How my position as a mother may affect my role as a researcher and the methodology of this study is detailed in Chapter 3.

1.3 The research setting: Malaysia

To better understand the specific context of this study throughout this thesis, some basic demographic, historical and sociocultural facts about Malaysia are provided. Malaysia is a developing country in Southeast Asia ("Top 25 developed", 2016) and is regarded as one of Southeast Asia's 'tiger economies' (Wilson, 2017). The following Figure 1.1 illustrates Malaysia on the map:

Figure 1.1 Map of Malaysia ("Malaysia Map", 2019)

According to the Malaysian Department of Statistics (2018), Malaysia has a population of 32.6 million people (up to the latter quarter of 2018). Malaysia's slogan as "Malaysia Truly Asia" (Tourism Malaysia, 2018) reflects the country's pride over its heterogeneous cultural composition that is claimed to generally represent the diverse population in the whole continent of Asia. To understand how Malaysia's population came to be multi-ethnic and multi-religious, it is important to look briefly at Malaysian history. Around the 15th century, Malaya (now known as Peninsular or West Malaysia), which is strategically located near the Malaccan Straits, became a meeting point for traders and merchants from the East (China) and West (India, the Middle East, Europe) (Haziq, 2016). Numerous encounters with Arab traders led the founder of the Malaccan Sultanate to convert to Islam from Hinduism, later followed by the majority of the Malay ethnic population, thus establishing the almost synonymous identities of Malay and Muslim in Malaysia we know today (Haziq, 2016). Many Indian and Chinese traders then had also moved to Malacca and lived together with the Malay-Muslim people. Such early forms of multiculturalism later spread all over Malaya and the surrounding regions. Over the centuries, from the early 16th century to Malaya's independence in 1957, Malaya (and Sabah and Sarawak in the Borneo) had been conquered by the Portuguese, the Dutch, the British, the Japanese and again by the British (Haziq, 2016). In 1963, the Federation of Malaya (which gained independence in 1957), Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore came to form Malaysia ("Malaysia profile – Timeline", 2018). In 1965, however, Singapore withdrew from Malaysia and since then, Malaysia has been made up of thirteen states,

two of which are Sabah and Sarawak in the Borneo (East Malaysia; on the right of Figure 1.1) and the rest of the states are in Peninsular Malaysia (West Malaysia; on the left of Figure 1.1), with a set of three federal territories (two in West Malaysia and one in East Malaysia) (Abdul Rashid, 2008; Haziq, 2016). Overall, these historical events in Malaysia contributed to the multi-ethnic and multi-religious population of Malaysia, which is partially reflected in the participants selected for this study (see Table 3.1 in section 3.6).

In terms of Malaysia's racial composition, the most recent current population estimates provided by the country's Department of Statistics report that Malaysia is composed of 69.1% *Bumiputeras* (with about 95% Malays and 5% indigenous peoples), 23% Chinese, 6.9% Indian and 1% of other ethnic groups (Index Mundi, 2018). Malaysia's religious composition closely reflects its ethnic composition, with about 70% Muslim (mostly Malays), followed by Buddhist (mostly Chinese), Christian (of any race, except Malay), Hindu (mostly Indians), other traditional Chinese religions as well as very few citizens with no specified faith (Index Mundi, 2018). In Malaysia, the Malay ethnic identity is exclusively tied to Islam, to the point that 'Malay-Muslim' is claimed to be the more accurate term to label the ethnic group (Siddique, 1981). Furthermore, the fact that there is a very limited number of people who identify as having no faith in Malaysia may reflect the citizens' fulfilment of the first of the five National Principles of Malaysia, i.e. belief in God (Tan, 2017). Ethnicity *and* religion, therefore, are clearly important intertwined elements in the lives of Malaysians. To clarify, the terms 'Malay' and 'Malaysian' are not synonymous, as the former refers to an ethnic group and the latter denotes the nationality of citizens of Malaysia, regardless of ethnicities and religions. The term 'Malay' also refers to the native language of the Malay people. Malay is the national and official language whilst English is a strong second language in Malaysia (Low, 2010). Because only Malay and English are offered as compulsory subjects in public schools in Malaysia, most non-Malays are able to speak at least three languages (their native tongue, Malay and English), whilst the Malays are typically conversant in only two languages, i.e. Malay and English. As a Malaysian, Malay and Muslim researcher for the current study, I acknowledge that I represent the arguably 'majority' position in terms of ethnicity and religion in Malaysia.

With regard to the population according to gender, Malaysian men slightly outnumber Malaysian women (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2018). The literacy rate for women in Malaysia is high at 96.3% - only 0.9% less than men. The school enrolment rate of females in Malaysia is higher than males at all education levels, with 91.3% of females enrolled at the secondary level (males: 85.8%) and 49.8% of females enrolled at the tertiary level (males: 37.8%) (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2018; Tan, Ruzita, Geetha & Hadijah, 2015). The empowerment of Malaysian women in education can, therefore, be regarded as high. When it comes to the labour force, Malaysian women's participation is starkly lower than Malaysian men (female: 54.8%, male: 80.1%). This figure is slightly increasing each year and is relatively low compared to other countries (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2018). Such incongruent statistics between female education levels and their involvement in the workforce also reflect the complex career decisions among mothers in Malaysia, which see an increasing number of highly qualified women becoming stay-at-home mothers (SAHMs) and work-at-home mothers (WAHMs) ("75% of Malaysian", 2018; Aditi Sharma, 2018; Irwan Nadzif & Nor Azaian, 2011; Tang, 2017). The complexities of employed mothers in Malaysia, and the role of the construction of 'good' mother identities, are elucidated in detail in Chapter 2 (see section 2.3.4a)

In terms of marriage statistics, the crude marriage rate in Malaysia is considered as above average compared to other more developed countries ("OECD family database", 2018). This information reflects the heterosexual married norm of the Malaysian population, and lifestyles related to homosexuality and cohabitation are generally frowned upon (Jerome, 2011; Malek, 2016). To reflect this norm in Malaysia, this study therefore purposefully focuses exclusively on participants who not only identify themselves as and biologically are women, but also who fit the heteronormative definition of a 'mother' (more information on participants can be found in section 3.6). It is hoped that this brief overview of Malaysian history and demographics will shed light on the significance of conducting a study on the discursive construction of identities among Malaysian mothers and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of identity construction processes in the data analysis chapters later. Other complexities within motherhood discourses that permeate the experiences and interactions of new mothers within the inherently complex demographics of Malaysia will be explicated later in Chapter 2.

1.4 Research aims and research questions

This research aims to explore the discursive construction of identities among new mothers in the largely under-researched context of Malaysia. In so doing, the study attempts to link the localised findings of this research setting with the broader understanding of how identities are constructed in and through discourses, as expressed by other identity scholars (Bamberg, De Fina & Schiffrin, 2011; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). More specifically, it also aspires to contribute to existing literature and debates in identity research by providing insights into how complex and fluid motherhood identities are constructed and negotiated among new Malaysian mothers in the inter-related contexts of communicative interviews and social media posts (Facebook and Instagram). To address these aims, this study is guided by these research questions (henceforth RQs):

1. What identities do the participants construct in interviews and on social media?

    a. What identities do the participants construct when they communicate about motherhood in relation to their career decisions in Malaysia?

    b. What identities do the participants construct when they communicate about motherhood in relation to the discourses of ethnicity and religion in Malaysia?

2. How are these identities constructed and negotiated in interviews and on social media?

    a. How do the participants construct and negotiate their identities within the intersecting discourses of motherhood and career decisions in Malaysia?

    b. How do the participants construct and negotiate their identities within the intersecting discourses of motherhood, ethnicity and religion in Malaysia?

These research questions also reflect the structure of the analysis chapters in this thesis. RQ 1 and RQ 2 are addressed generally across all three analysis chapters (Chapter 4, to Chapter 6). The more specific RQs 1a and 2a are addressed in Chapter 5 whilst RQs 1b and 2b are addressed in Chapter 6. To address the aims of study explicated above, the second set of research questions is given more emphasis throughout the study,

compared to RQs 1, because the ways the participants construct and negotiate their identities are most salient.

1.5 Significance of the study

In general, this study aims to contribute to heightened awareness and understanding among academic researchers and the general public, especially new Malaysian mothers and mothers-to-be, of the intricate ways in which identities related to motherhood are constructed and negotiated in and through discourses. Further awareness in this research area may help them to better understand the various linguistic resources and strategies used by new mothers to construct and negotiate their multiple identities, thus allowing them to suggest and provide necessary support to one another. Besides that, the inclusion of Malaysian participants from different demographic backgrounds, as well as the integration of social media discourses, can potentially offer academic researchers and the public a fresher and more relevant linguistic perspective on the complex processes involved in the discursive construction of motherhood identities today. This study can also help researchers gain new theoretical insights in the fields of applied linguistics, discourse analysis, identity and online communication which are exemplified within the under-researched area of Malaysia. The significant theoretical and social contributions of this research will be reiterated in more depth in the discussion and concluding chapters.

1.6 Structure of the thesis

I have divided this thesis into eight chapters. From this introductory chapter onwards, this thesis will proceed with Chapter 2 in which I will review scholarly work relating to three main aspects: the conception and construction of identities more generally; the construction of identities in motherhood; and recent developments in identity construction through social media discourses. This review highlights the gap that this research intends to fill in the field of discursive identity construction, motherhood and social media. The subsequent Chapter 3 will detail the paradigmatic position that this research takes, the relevant theoretical and analytical framework used, the selected participants, the methodological tools employed - as well as the specific stages involved in collecting and analysing the research interview and social media data.

Chapter 4 onwards will report the findings and analysis of the data collected for this research. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 will explicate specific 'focused themes', namely: constructing 'good' mother identities (in general); navigating motherhood discourses in relation to career decisions; and negotiating identities in relation to ethnicity and religion, respectively. Chapter 4, in particular, will first provide a general overview of the major themes and the rationale for choosing the ''good' mother' as the overarching theme in this thesis. The rest of the chapter is dedicated to outlining in general terms the three major ways identities are constructed among the participants in relation to the overarching theme.

Chapter 5, which provides a more focused analysis of the selected data in relation to the overlapping discourses of the ''good' mother' and 'relations to career', will illustrate processes of identity construction that involve participants navigating these two salient discourses and more specifically, the three common career-role categories among mothers in Malaysia. Chapter 6 further explores the processes of identity construction in terms of two other salient demographic aspects: the participants' ethnicities and religions. The two main sub-sections in this chapter will be dedicated to these discourses, respectively.

Chapter 7 is the discussion chapter of the thesis and it will critically synthesise the analyses from all the previous three chapters in relation to the study's research questions, as stipulated at the beginning of the thesis. This will be done with reference to relevant literature to illuminate the knowledge-based and theoretical contributions of this research. The final chapter, Chapter 8, will ultimately summarise the complex findings in order to reiterate the contributions and social implications of this study, beyond the contexts of this PhD research. I conclude my thesis with some suggestions for future research which will hopefully inspire other discourse analytic and identity researchers to develop further insights in related fields.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews relevant literature that informs the arguments and guides the direction of this research. This chapter is divided into three main sections: conceptualisations and discursive constructions of identities; constructions of identities specifically related to motherhood; and recent developments in identity construction via media discourses, with an emphasis on the Internet and social media. Through a critical review of scholarly work in these three interrelated areas, I will comment on how this research can meaningfully contribute to the related fields of discursive identity construction. The chapter ends by highlighting the research gaps that the present thesis could potentially address.

2.2 Conceptualisations and discursive constructions of identities

This first section explores the ways scholars define identities and explicates how identities are constructed. It begins with a general overview of how identities are defined and constructed, followed by a review of the more specific discursive constructions of identities among women.

2.2.1 Identities and identity construction: A general overview

Identity construction has become one of the most salient research topics in the social sciences and humanities (Angouri, 2015; Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Erikson, 1980). The increasing interest may stem from the idea that identity is a core feature of human beings; at every stage of life, people identify themselves as unique individuals with certain characteristics and functions in social groups. Kroger (2007) reiterates that identity guides life paths and decisions as well as empowers people in relation to their affiliation with social groups. Bucholtz and Hall (2010), in fact, even go as far as claiming that this is "the age of identity" (p. 27). It is unsurprising, therefore, that there has been a growing interdisciplinary interest in the formation, negotiation and development of identities (De Fina, Schiffrin & Bamberg, 2006; Walz, 2018).

Since the notion of identity is fundamental to this research, the many definitions put forward by scholars need to be reviewed. The word 'identity' originates from the Latin word, *identitas, "*from *idem* which indicates *similarity*, along with the notion of *difference"* (Jenkins, 2004, p. 4). Burke and Reitzes (1981) postulate that "identities are meanings one attributes to oneself in a role (and that others attribute to one)" (p. 84). As implied in this statement, identity is often closely related to the idea of selves and roles. Some scholars distinguish between identities, selves and roles, mostly postulating that identities and roles make up and constitute the self. The self is viewed as more cognitive (Oyserman, Elmore & Smith, 2012), while identities are relatively more dynamic (Valverde, Sovet & Lubart, 2017). However, the associations between the three terms have led many scholars to use them interchangeably (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Burke & Reitzes, 1981). I, henceforth, will use the terms in the same way in this thesis.

In layperson's terms, identity is widely regarded as involving people's explicit or implicit responses to the question: "Who are you?" (Vignoles, Scwartz & Luyckx, 2011). Within the field of applied linguistics, however, the ways identity is perceived are a lot more complex. There have been broad paradigmatic shifts in the conceptualisations of identity, from the positivist and essentialist treatment of identity as an inherent, fixed and discoverable entity, to more recent understandings of social and collective identities (Angouri, 2015; Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). The initial shift from the "project of the self" to the "product of the social", however, still to a large extent viewed identity as pre-determined and clear-cut based on a set of social variables (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 24).

More recently, postmodern accounts see identity as plural, fragmentary, contingent and most importantly, constituted in discourses (Angouri, 2015; Benwell & Stokoe, 2010; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; De Fina, 2010). This view of identity reflects postmodernism more generally, which embraces the complexity, heterogeneity, openness and possibility of the social world (Clarke, 2003). Poststructuralism emerged from postmodernism, and can be seen in the work of 'poststructuralists' like Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser (Butler, 2002, Mackenzie, 2016). This theoretical perspective argues that we understand our world through language (Belsey, 2002), and that language is viewed as a social, unfixed, plural, heterogeneous and shifting

phenomenon through which dominant social norms can be resisted and transformed (Weedon, 1997). This shift reflects the "discursive turn" in the latter half of the twentieth century which sees a focus on discourse-based approaches. Identity, in this perspective, is described as "multiple, complex and a site of struggle" (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009, p. 5) and a "fluid, dynamic and shifting process, capable of both reproducing and destabilising the discursive order, but also one in which people's identity work is analysed in talk" (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 34). Before continuing this argument, it is crucial to understand what actually constitutes discourse.

Discourse refers to the ways of representing and seeing the world as well as articulating, maintaining, negotiating and resisting some of these ways (Fairclough, 2003; Litosseliti, 2006). Discourses also denote "sets of rules about what can and cannot be said in a particular situation and by whom" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 3). van Dijk (1990) emphasises that discourse is "text in context" which highlights the importance of contexts (p. 164). Every discourse, moreover, is believed to be meaningful, ideological, and related to and construed via many other supporting and competing discourses (Litosseliti, 2006; Wodak, 1997). These discourses represent potential sites of struggle, and by resisting and contesting dominant discourses (prevailing ways of talking and writing about people and events), individuals can self-assess and transform their identities and develop a sense of agency (Fairclough, 1992; Litosseliti, 2006; Thomas & Wareing,1999). Multiple discourses, thus, have a central role in identity construction and negotiation in a range of social contexts. From this point, henceforth, the plural form, 'discourses', will mostly be used to reflect the understanding that discourse is a complex and multiple phenomenon.

In seeking to understand complex identity issues, examining discourses also enables us to see how social and discursive experiences and practices are constructed and influence the ways people conceptualise themselves, negotiate roles and intersubjectively construct their subject positions and identities (Bamberg et al., 2011; Fairclough, 1992; Foucault, 1972). The idea that identity is actively constituted and constructed in discourse is espoused by Benwell and Stokoe (2010), who emphasise the relocation of identity from the 'private' realms of the mind to the 'public' realms of discourse. This discursive view of identity parallels Bucholtz and Hall (2005) who regard identity as a "relational and sociocultural phenomenon that emerges and

circulates in local discourse contexts of interaction" (pp. 585-6). Identity, thus, can be summarised as the social positioning of oneself and others (Angermuller, 2014; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). It is this definition of identity that I adopt in the present study. The crucial role of discourse in identity construction is highlighted in the work of many discourse analysts (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Gee, 1999). Discourse analysis essentially refers to the "analysis of the text as product, but is ultimately concerned with language in a social context, shaped by discursive and socio-cultural practices" (Litosseliti, 2006, p. 1). Understanding identity as constructed in and through discourse allows researchers to study identity even in the most mundane, everyday situations (Bamberg et al., 2011). This is precisely what my research is aiming to do: unpack the intricate details underlying identity construction among new mothers in their seemingly common everyday discursive practices.

The views on identity put forward thus far are in keeping with theories of social constructionism. Constructionist theories treat 'identity' as "a socially constructed category, i.e. it is whatever people agree it to be in any given historical and cultural context" (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 9). Thus, in addition to viewing identity through a linguistic lens, it is necessary also to discuss the social contexts that contribute to identity. Discourse analysis takes into account the context of what has been said, how it was said and why it may have been said (Bamberg et al., 2011). Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) five sociocultural linguistic principles, namely: *emergence*, *positionality*, *indexicality*, *relationality* and *partialness*, comprehensively capture the intricate contextual aspects that are salient in one's portrayal of self (Bamberg et al., 2011). Given that I will employ some of these principles as this study's specific theoretical and analytical framework, I will explain them in greater detail in the next chapter (see section 3.2).

Another perspective worth noting is Gee's (1999) integrated approach to discourse and identity. This perspective focuses on language as it is used, and analysed in relation to its ability to enact social and cultural activities, perspectives and identities. Gee (2011b) argues that "the ways we make visible and recognisable *who* we are and *what* we are doing always involves more than just language" (p. 9). He, in fact, believes that linguistic analyses must be holistic and have 'a point'. Gee (2011a)

makes the distinction between 'discourse' and 'Discourse' (denoted by the use of lower-case 'd' and upper-case 'D'). He (1996) defines 'discourse' as language that is used "on site" to enact activities and identities. 'Discourse', on the other hand, is described as a socially accepted association among ways of talking, listening, writing, and reading, and other symbolic expressions of thinking, feeling, acting, interacting, believing and valuing that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group (Gee, 1996). Gee's conceptualisation of Discourse is similar to Foucault's (1990) 'order of discourse' which is a discrete realm of discursive practices consisting of various rules, systems and procedures. Gee's (2011a) inclination towards looking at Discourses as language in addition to "other stuff" (p. 34) is in accordance with Bamberg et al. (2011), who point out that a discursive approach brings together language and other textual and contextual communicative means in order to understand the relationship between form and meaning in identity construction. In the work of Bamberg et al. (2011), discourse analysis sees identity as fundamentally constructed by such societal 'macro' conditions. Nonetheless, they mention that "both foci - the textual and the contextual/interactional - may be combined, showing how the form, as well as the content of a text, have been interactionally emergent" (p. 180).

The connection between both discourse ("on the ground" in situ and in real interactive practices) and Discourse (wider cultural sense-making strategies) in analysis is also embedded in a *narrative analysis* and *positioning theory* (Bamberg et al., 2011; Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Benwell & Stokoe, 2010). In *narrative analysis*, it is argued that storytelling is a key part of social life, through which people construct their identities, and their descriptions and evaluations of themselves and others can be 'edited' (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Georgakopoulou, 2013). Narrative analysts claim that "if selves and identities are constituted in discourse, they are necessarily constructed in stories" (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 138). From the narrative perspective, there is inter-dependency between personal stories and wider cultural stories, which are known as 'discourses' or 'master narratives' (Bamberg et al., 2011; Benwell & Stokoe, 2010). Such inter-dependency is developed in one of the strands in narrative identity that is based on *positioning theory*. This theory explores the two-way construction of identities between speakers and their audience (Benwell & Stokoe, 2010) and involves "the close inspection of how speakers describe people and their actions in one way rather than another and, by doing so, perform discursive

actions that result in acts of identity" (Bamberg et al., 2011, p. 182). There is also another strand of discourse and identity work called *critical discursive psychology*, which draws on notions of 'subject positions', poststructuralism and the sociology of science, attempting to combine the 'macro' and the 'micro' resulting in what is called a 'genealogical approach' (Benwell & Stokoe, 2010). These three strands of discourse and identity work represent some of the most established approaches to researching discursive identity construction, and have come also to be adopted by researchers in related fields.

Overall, as reviewed in this section, poststructuralist discursive approaches are well-established in recent identity research (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Walz, 2018; Weedon, 1997). The following sub-section will review the construction of identities specifically among women, and justify my decision to subscribe to a discourse-based perspective on identity, as well as to employ a specific poststructuralist and discourse analytical approach to guide the direction of this research.

2.2.2 The discursive construction of identities among women

Following the poststructuralist turn in the fields of discourse and identity, there was also a corresponding shift in the literature on discursive gender identity (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Butler, 1990; Sunderland, 2004). Poststructuralist understandings of gender are concerned with the differences between males and females that are socially learned, mediated or constructed, something that people *orient to* and *do*, in opposition to the biological, essentialist and deterministic meanings of the term 'sex' (Charlebois, 2011; Sunderland, 2004). In her same work, Sunderland reiterates that gendered discourses position women and men in different ways, legitimate the 'male/female binary' and are thus often evaluated as unfavourable to women. Such gendered discourses that represent, reinforce, resist and challenge gendered social practices often intersect with and lead to the emergence of other discourses (Litosseliti, 2006). Gender identities are, correspondingly, conceptualised as effects of discursive practices, through which people draw on the discourses of femininity and masculinity, and are therefore multi-faceted, diverse, fluid, fragmented and contradictory (Litosseliti, 2006). It must also be noted that gender identities are not only constructed based on the differences between men and women but also based on the similarities

and differences between members of the same sex (Baxter, 2007; Charlebois, 2011). The emergence of feminist approaches was initially seen as incongruent since poststructuralism "questions the very categories and unified identities" that modernist feminists have used to explore and critique gender differences and inequalities (Baxter, 2007). Nonetheless, over the years, poststructuralism has been regarded as a highly relevant and applicable theoretical lens means through which researchers can explore the fluid and contested meanings surrounding not just power but also gender and identity issues (Baxter, 2007). Feminist poststructuralist approaches maintain that new possibilities can be envisaged through language, whereby individuals can construct possibly transformative discursive positions (Baxter, 2007; Weedon, 1997). This is where I see Feminist Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis (FPDA) as being relevant. FPDA advocates that social realities are always discursively produced – speakers do not exist outside discourse (Baxter, 2007). I will, therefore, now explain briefly why FPDA is chosen to form the overarching theoretical and analytical framework underpinning this research, along with Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) sociocultural linguistic principles of identity construction and Schippers' (2007) concepts of hegemonic femininities, all of which will be explained in detail in Chapter 3.

FPDA is a highly relevant approach in the current study; it allows for a detailed investigation of the ways in which multifaceted identities are constructed among female parents in 'micro'-level linguistic contexts (in the present study, in face-to-face talk and on social media platforms), whilst not disregarding the role of the 'macro'-level contexts. FPDA also considers intertextualised discourses in spoken interaction and other types of text (Baxter, 2007), an approach that is fitting with the multimodal nature of texts in the current study. A feminist perspective on poststructuralist discourse analysis, unsurprisingly, regards gender differences as some of the most dominant discourses across many cultures when analysing various types of texts (Baxter, 2007). For my research, however, gender differences may not always emerge from issues that are clearly related to gender differences between men and women. I am, instead, more interested in exploring the intra-gender similarities and differences within and between women themselves. This aim is in line with FPDA's empowering vision, which refuses to constitute gender in binary terms and explores women's experiences of the complexities and ambiguities of power (Baxter, 2007).

FPDA, moreover, offers a 'supplementary' approach to other established schools of discourse analysis such as conversation analysis (CA) and critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Baxter, 2007). To make up for the limitations inherent in these methods, especially in terms of the 'micro-macro' dichotomy, FPDA offers a multi-perspectival approach that provides richer complex insights and new ways of thinking in linguistic research (Baxter, 2010). Despite the differences in various discourse analytical approaches, CDA has the most similarities with FPDA. Before explaining the differences, it must be noted that both approaches emerged from social constructionist origins, rooted in the ideas that language is a social practice and constructs identities, that there is a close relationship between language and power, the importance of the self-reflexive researcher, the principle of intertextuality and the role of deconstruction in conducting discourse analysis (Baxter, 2010; Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Litosseliti, 2006). In terms of textual analysis, as in CDA, a key aspect of FPDA is "the identification and naming of significant discourses within spoken and written texts" (Baxter, 2008).

The fundamental differences between the two approaches, however, justify the adoption of FPDA as the theoretical and analytical framework in this study over CDA. FPDA claims to be a 'transformative quest' which supports small-scale, bottom-up localised social transformations and, thus, gives space to marginalised or silenced voices (Baxter, 2007), such as the voices of mothers in this research. Such an approach is different from CDA, which has been criticised for its 'top-down' approach taking certain identity categories, like gender, for granted (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). Furthermore, within FPDA, Baxter (2007) espouses the *synchronic-diachronic* dimension. The *synchronic* dimension involves identifying critical moments in conversation where subject positioning or power shifts may occur. This dimension reflects Connell's acknowledgement that "power is fluid and thus individuals shift between positions with relative degrees of power" (Connell, 1987, as cited in Charlebois, 2011, p. 13). The *diachronic* dimension, on the other hand, is concerned with analysing the language of individuals as they interact over time, and ascertaining the norms and practices of the communities to which they belong. This is achieved by longer term, ethnographic methods (Baxter, 2007). Another distinctive feature of FPDA that is key in this research is the acknowledgement of the diversity and complexities of speakers' identities, i.e. their different voices and accounts, unlike

CA's and CDA's more unitary and deductive perspective (Baxter, 2007). This approach, therefore, offers space for "competing voices and diverse accounts of experience and resist[s] a single line of argument or closure" (Baxter, 2008). In addition, using the FPDA approach allows a focus on how meanings and identities are defined and redefined, as well as on resistance, struggles and diversity (Mackenzie, 2017). The current study of female parents intends to unpack each of these aspects.

In terms of textual analysis, FPDA advocates an interplay between micro- and macro-analysis which works on two levels, namely: (i) *denotative* – describing interactions in close, but non-evaluative detail; and (ii) *connotative* – interpreting the data based on how speakers are "constantly jockeying for positions of power according to competing and intertextualised discourses" (Baxter, 2008, p. 251). FPDA's emphasis on intertextuality in the *connotative* analysis raises awareness of another identity relation that is central in this study: the relative positions of *powerfulness-powerlessness* among the female participants in their portrayal of selves. FPDA supports the analysis of interwoven and competing discourses within which speakers may continuously and simultaneously negotiate power (Baxter, 2010). These salient analytical concepts in FPDA will be explicated further in Chapter 3 in relation to the current study, as they form a fundamental part of the study's analytical framework (see section 3.2). In the next chapter, I will explicate how the integration of the concepts in FPDA, alongside Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) sociocultural linguistic principles and Schippers' (2007) concepts of hegemonic femininities, can address the criticisms directed at existing discourse analytic approaches. These other approaches are often criticised for being overly focused on micro-level analysis, thereby failing to engage with higher level theory and phenomena, ignoring people's 'subjectivity', 'experience' and 'unconsciousness', and neglecting the embodied nature of social interaction (Benwell & Stokoe, 2010).

2.3 Construction of identities in motherhood

It is also important to note that literature on identity and gender issues among women commonly focuses on developmental stages such as childhood, adolescence, adulthood, motherhood and post-menopause (Baxter, 2007; Mackenzie, 2016; Sunderland, 2004). As such, I have focused my research on arguably one of the most

significant and eventful developmental stages, which is sometimes regarded as defining womanhood: motherhood (Arendell, 1999; Goodwin & Huppatz, 2010). This section, hence, reviews other relevant scholarly work on identity that focuses specifically on motherhood. I shall explore literature on social constructions of motherhood, before moving on to literature that advocates the discursive constructions of identities in motherhood.

Identities related to motherhood often revolve around the characteristics and expectations of what mothers should do and be: "Mother has been established as a normative construct, a mechanism through which women do what they 'should'" (Goodwin & Huppatz, 2010, p. 4). Weaver and Ussher (1997), in fact, point out that there is a growing interdisciplinary interest in exploring the realities of mothers' lives. Previous research on identity construction in motherhood has put forth the contentious idea that motherhood constitutes womanhood (Arendell, 1999; Goodwin & Huppatz, 2010). Rich (1986), in fact, postulates that the value of a woman is "contingent on her being pregnant or newly delivered" (p. 169). This idea arises because motherhood is usually socially constructed as an integral, 'natural' identity among female adults across different cultures (Arendell, 1999; Choi et al., 2005; Smyth, 2012; Weaver & Ussher, 1997; Yulindrasari & McGregor, 2011). For example, in Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia, a woman's key identity still largely focuses on her role as a mother (Yulindrasari & McGregor, 2011). In other words, mothering is acknowledged in many societies as the main avenue through which women form their identities (Arendell, 1999).

2.3.1 Motherhood: Massive identity changes?

There has been a growing body of applied linguistic research focused on the conflicting dynamics of identities in motherhood (Bailey, 1999; Laney et al., 2013). This might be due to the fact that construction of identities during this transitional period involves reconceptualising the self, acquiring and mastering new behaviours and skills, and accepting the permanency of the change (Mercer, 2004). As such, it can be said that there are several cognitive, behavioural and emotional changes that may affect a mother's newfound identities.

Steinberg (2008) postulates that being a mother leads a woman to modify her internalised ideals about motherhood in relation to herself and others. Some ways in which motherhood can positively modify, expand and redefine expectations surrounding motherhood are by "developing new personal qualities, by increasing relational capacity and concern for others, by creating a sense of lasting influence, by contributing to younger generations and by enhancing their engagement with their careers" (Laney et al., 2013, p. 1227). Many cultures place a high value on the status of mothers because of these positive characteristics, along with the fact that motherhood is considered a rite of passage among women. This is seen markedly in many African cultures, for instance; a woman's role in reproduction is attributed enormous symbolic value, since it "reinforces the human group, ensures continuity of life and becomes equated with life itself" (Steady, 1996, p. 7). Generally, motherhood is believed to grant a positive identity to a woman and the positive societal discourses that exist around motherhood reinforce this image (Weaver & Ussher, 1997).

Since motherhood is regarded as a significant positive developmental event for women, women are expected to naturally 'excel' at mothering (Abrams & Curran, 2010; Martell, 2001; Mercer, 2004). This view is advocated by several scholars who highlight that female parents seem to hold non-negotiable child-rearing responsibilities because they are regarded as naturally-suited to and experts in care-giving due to their presumed innate maternal qualities (Abrams & Curran, 2010; Smyth, 2012; Wall, 2013; Yulindrasari & McGregor, 2011). A mother's identities, therefore, are generally associated with many characteristics necessary for bringing up a child. Such assumptions and ideals, nonetheless, may burden and disillusion new mothers (Weaver & Ussher, 1997). The disillusionment experienced by some new mothers, hence, can be said to stem from this drastic identity transformation. The factors that contribute to these changes are reiterated by Smith (1994), as follows:

> Becoming a mother is a time of multifaceted change in a woman's life, in that a woman's biology, sense of identity, and social relations change when she has a child. The process of pregnancy can be a catalyst for self-evaluation and self-reconstruction among first-time mothers.
>
> (as cited in Laney et al., 2013, p. 1229).

The multidimensional changes have, thus, led to many women feeling unprepared when they first became mothers and describing the experience as a 'tremendous shock' (Choi et al., 2005). Choi and colleagues further elucidate that such experiences occur because motherhood provides little room for experiments, distanced experiences or developing a sense of agency, since a woman cannot change her mind about being a mother. The shock, pressure and accompanying exhaustion that many new mothers experience are related to the patriarchal motherhood myths that foster the belief that women are biologically destined to be mothers and the ultimate caregivers (Abbey & O'Reilly, 1998, as cited in Austin & Carpenter, 2008; Choi et al., 2005).

These changes among new mothers may also lead to a loss of sense of self. The all-consuming and selfless nature of motherhood sparks immense changes (Choi, et al., 2005). According to Rich (1986), a mother's frustration may stem from the ideal that "maternal love is, and should be, quite literally selfless" (p. 22). Women are expected to automatically sacrifice and modify many aspects of their former identities to demanding childcare once they become mothers, particularly in the first year of motherhood (Choi, et al., 2005; Laney et al., 2013). Such maternal self-sacrifice is attributed to the argument that children should come first (Abrams & Curran, 2010; Liamputtong et al., 2004). Consequently, many new mothers feel that motherhood restricts a woman's freedom of action compared to past identities before childbirth (Weaver & Ussher, 1997). This may lead to a considerable loss of sense of self.

2.3.2 Expectations versus realities of motherhood?

The significant changes can also be attributed to the discrepancies between the societal expectations of motherhood and its realities, which may cause further difficulties in identity formation. Some mothers have reported that the reality of motherhood is far from what they had initially expected (Austin & Carpenter, 2008; Choi et al., 2005; Laney et al., 2013; Liamputtong et al., 2004; Weaver & Ussher, 1997). Some new mothers are found to be navigating their expectations about mothering versus their lived reality of motherhood (Shelton & Johnson, 2006; Smyth, 2012). The discrepancy experienced by many new mothers is a salient and challenging aspect of constructing and negotiating new identities in motherhood.

Many new mothers, upon learning that the image of the 'happy family' is misleading, struggle to deal with their new identities, because they feel cheated (Choi et al., 2005; Weaver & Ussher, 1997). In response to such a situation, feminist research has attempted to put forth a more realistic picture of motherhood by giving voice to women to express their motherhood experiences (Choi et al., 2005). Nonetheless, the traditional motherhood ideology is still dominant, with an expectation that women have positive feelings about motherhood (Choi et al., 2005; Laney et al., 2013). The incongruence between motherhood myths and reality, along with the demanding role of childcare, a sense of lost self-identity, and possible friction between spouses in relation to the new child, has left many new mothers feeling unprepared, inadequate, guilty and overwhelmed (Liamputtong et al., 2004; Weaver & Ussher, 1997). Moreover, cultural representations of femininity today view the ideal woman as 'superwoman' and mothers as 'supermums' who can cope with competing demands. These expectations may cause some new mothers to view themselves as failures, thus threatening their sense of identity as women (Arendell, 1999; Choi et al., 2005). Some studies, in fact, point out that the lived postpartum experiences of mothers are predominantly negative, to the point that pain, a pervasive loss of self and exhaustion may translate into post-partum depression (PPD), especially during the first five years of motherhood (Abrams & Curran, 2010; Choi et al., 2005; Hwa-Froelich et al., 2008). All this suggests that women face various conflicts when transitioning into motherhood (Choi et al., 2005; Laney et al., 2013). The current study, therefore, aims to unpack the ways that my participants negotiate the discrepancies between their reported motherhood realities and expectations, through an analysis of the various ways they portray themselves in diverse discursive contexts.

From a social constructionist perspective, dominant discourses of motherhood are considered the standard against which to understand, evaluate and construct motherhood practices, experiences and ideas (Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson, 2001). Dominant motherhood discourses can be regarded as the discourses that shape expectations of motherhood in certain contexts. 'Intensive mothering', a wholly child-centred, emotionally involving and time-consuming discourse, for example, is regarded as one of the dominant motherhood discourses internalised among many mothers in Australasian, European and North American settings (Arendell, 1999;

Duberley, & Carrigan, 2012). Hays (1996) provides a more detailed account of 'intensive mothering' in the following statement:

> …intensive mothering tells us that children are innocent and priceless, that their rearing should be carried out primarily by individual mothers and that it should be centred on children's needs, with methods that are informed by experts, labour-intensive, and costly.
>
> (p.21).

Mothers who follow this ideology might practise selflessness by always prioritising their children's needs instead of their own and fully dedicating their time to childcare (Arendell, 1999; Hilbrecht, Shaw, Johnson & Andrey, 2008). Such intensive mothering discourses have also increased the popularity of mothering decisions such as breastfeeding and 'baby-wearing' (Smyth, 2012). In relation to this study, I also regard such discourses as being closely tied to mothers' career decisions, as the expectation in 'intensive mothering' is that the mother will not work. Considering that intensive mothering contributes to the discrepancies between motherhood realities and expectations across those societies in which a patriarchal ideology of motherhood is dominant (Green, 2010), I would, henceforth, adopt the meanings associated with intensive mothering to refer to 'dominant motherhood discourses' in this thesis.

2.3.3 Discourses of ''good' mothers' versus ''bad' mothers'?

Previous work on discursive construction of identities among mothers has highlighted that dominant motherhood discourses are often linked specifically to ideas of the ''good' mother'. I would like to note that in this study, henceforward, the term 'good' in the phrase ''good' mother' is consistently used in inverted commas to suggest the subjective and provisional meaning of the notion. Goodwin and Huppatz (2010) assert that the ''good' mother' discourse requires mothers to act and portray themselves in responsible and culturally acceptable ways, and that this discourse is a "formidable social construct placing pressure on women to conform to particular standards and ideals, against which they are judged and judge themselves" (pp. 1-2). In fact, in relation to the feminist poststructuralist approach that has been elucidated earlier, I agree with Mackenzie (2017) that "preferred forms of gendered subjectivity, such as the 'good' mother are offered through *discourses*" (p. 297). The notion of the ''good'

mother' is reflected clearly in the dominant motherhood discourses, such as in the intensive mothering ideology explained previously. Arendell (1999, p. 3) specifically points out that the 'good' mother has these characteristics:

> The *good* mother is heterosexual, married and monogamous. She is White and native born. She is not economically self-sufficient, which means, given the persistent gender gap in earnings, largely economically dependent on her income-earning husband (unless she's independently wealthy and, in that case, allows her husband to handle the finances). She is not employed.

According to Goodwin and Huppatz (2010), such ''good' mother' discourses feed into most mothers' innate desire to be 'good', hence significantly shaping their identities, actions and feelings. These ideas stem from the ideology of natural mothers which sets the standard against which women measure themselves and others (Choi et al., 2005). The ''good' mother' discourses act as a way of evaluating mothers, and thus continue to have a powerful impact on women's lives (Ruddick, 1989), compelling many of them to compare themselves to other mothers (Arendell, 1999). For all these reasons, Arendell's (1999) definition of a 'good' mother is also adopted by the current study to refer to 'dominant ('good') motherhood discourses' in the forthcoming analytic chapters. In addition, when relating the 'good' mother characteristics espoused by Arendell (1999) to this study, it is interesting to note that most of the descriptions revolve around the idea of economic dependence. I will, therefore, argue later on how this notion is closely tied to mothers' career decisions.

One of the normative attributes of a 'good' mother is the mother who invests considerable time and emotions in her children and thereby produces socially and academically accomplished children (Abrams & Curran, 2010). These notions reflect the "widely held belief that the well-being of children is inextricably linked to the conduct of mothers" (McKeever & Miller, 2004, p.1177). This reflects the possibly positive contributions of ''good' motherhood' narratives by reiterating that they actually guide the everyday actions of subjects (Austin & Carpenter, 2008). The belief that the measure of a mother is her child (Austin & Carpenter, 2008; Goodwin & Huppatz, 2010), however, is linked to the culture of 'mother blame', in which mothers are held accountable for all their children's outcomes, as well as 'neoliberal risk

culture' which puts pressure on mothers to reduce all conceivable child-related risks, hence evoking a sense of failure brought about by negative self and societal evaluation (Arendell, 1999; Brookes, Harvey & Mullany, 2017). This shows that the ''good' mother' discourses can potentially bring about some dilemmas among new mothers when dealing with the realities of motherhood and may offer them a disempowering subject position.

The discourses of ''good' motherhood' can widen the gap between societal expectations of how new mothers should feel and how mothers actually feel (Adams & Dell, 2008). Many mothers, for example, have mixed feelings about asking for and accepting help whilst grappling with the inherently difficult phase of new motherhood, leading to deep feelings of inadequacy, guilt, depression and failure (Abrams & Curran, 2010; Choi et al., 2005; Duberly & Carrigan, 2012). In relation to this issue, Austin and Carpenter (2008) observe that some women propose counter narratives to challenge cultural narratives that exclude them or judge them harshly. In doing so, however, they may be labelled as troublesome or troubled. This signifies how new mothers can oppose the dominant discourses of ''good' motherhood' which label them as incapable if they do not conform to the ideals. Mothers may find that their own health, safety and well-being, for example, are at risk in their quest to always put their children and families' needs before their own (Goodwin & Huppatz, 2010). It is evident that the ''good' mother' discourses "shape women's very identities and activities and if resisted, mothering ideology forms the backdrop for action and assessment" (Arendell, 1999). This suggests how, in some ways, ''good' motherhood' discourses can become unconstructive in the negotiation of identities among mothers.

The fact that there are motherhood practices associated with 'good' or 'bad' motherhood discourses signifies that the element of 'hegemony' is likely to be relevant in the discursive construction of identities among new mothers. This is because 'hegemony' relates to dominance and subordination of certain aspects of culture (Connell, 1995; Gramsci, 1998), such as gender, or more specifically for this research, certain mothering decisions. This is reflected in Arendell's (1999) claim that social beliefs in 'intensive mothering' are viewed as the preferred and dominant ''good' mothering' ideology and, thus, constitute a hegemonic form of motherhood. The concept of hegemonic femininities is therefore important in understanding hegemonic

motherhood. Hegemonic femininities are "the characteristics defined as womanly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Schippers, 2007, p. 94). The concept of hegemonic femininities, therefore, is applicable in this study as it posits that 'good' motherhood discourses are grounded in gender-related characteristics and ideals of male dominance. This concept brings us to a discussion of the characteristics that are viewed to be 'womanly' (Schnurr, Zayts & Hopkins, 2016) and in the context of this research, what qualities are considered 'motherly' or fitting for 'good' mothers. This concept is also related to the gendered discourses evaluated by Sunderland (2004) and Litosseliti (2006). The gendered discourses of parenting, for instance, explore the discursive practice of 'mothers as main parents' (Sunderland, 2004; Sunderland, 2006), which is especially relevant in the current study.

Hegemonic motherhood is a patriarchal construction that ties women's identities to their roles in childcare and consequently, regulates women's lives (Arendell, 1999; Goodwin & Huppatz, 2010). The discourses of the ''good' mother' combine elements of hegemonic femininity – that women have to be 'womanly' – with the idea of being 'motherly'. Mothers inevitably draw on dominant and subordinate gender-related and mothering beliefs, ideologies and decisions; thus, the notion of hegemonic motherhood is a useful lens through which to consider the data in the present thesis. This concept will critically explain the assumptions that contribute to the daily discursive construction of identities among new mothers and the interlinked relationships between social practices and discourse(s), as highlighted from the perspective of FPDA. For these reasons, Schippers' (2007) concept of hegemonic femininities is integrated into the theoretical and analytical framework of this study along with other sub-frameworks, and this will be explained in the next chapter (section 3.2).

Thus far, the reviewed literature suggests that motherhood is a complex construct and that the concept of the ''good' mother' can be restricting for mothers. The intricate complexities of discursive identity construction in motherhood, however, have mostly been explored in scholarly work conducted in Australasia, Europe and North America (Wall 2013; Weaver & Ussher, 1997). Only recently have the complexities and

pressures of motherhood in other cultural settings been considered. For example, the Nigerian feminist writer Emecheta (2005) argues that motherhood is realistically full of contradictions – fulfilling but also painful. Indeed, there is a need to explore various contexts of the discursive construction of motherhood identities, beyond Australasian, European and North American settings, to more fully understand these contradictions. Such an investigation is especially crucial in Malaysia, because motherhood issues have primarily been investigated through the lenses of health and medical psychology (see Achanna, Krishnaswamy, Ponnampalam & Chattopadhyay, 2018; Razali, Fisher & Kirkman, 2018), law (Ahmad, Lilienthal & Hussain, 2016) and general sociology (Tan et al., 2015), rather than from a discursive perspective. Additional research related to various cultural contexts of motherhood will be further elucidated in the forthcoming sub-section (see 2.3.4 (b)).

2.3.4 Contextual perceptions and construction of 'good' motherhood

Existing research has shown that contextual factors have a significant influence on the construction of identities among women and mothers (Abrams & Curran, 2010; Laney et al., 2013). According to Bhopal (1998), women come to motherhood from a variety of different backgrounds, social structures and experiences and therefore, are diverse in their behaviours and perceptions of motherhood. This diversity is realised in many aspects such as parenting styles, maternal effect, expectations, beliefs and responsibilities (Abrams & Curran, 2010; Duberly & Carrigan, 2012). There is, hence, a need to explore the actual ways in which motherhood is perceived by mothers (Laney et al., 2013). All this corresponds to Phoenix and Woollett's (1991) claim that motherhood is multi-faceted, and perceptions, expectations and discourses of motherhood are not uniform.

A number of studies indicate that some mothers have mixed feelings about their motherhood experiences, and they are indecisive when asked to describe their experiences as mostly positive or negative. Some of these studies have shown fascinating patterns amongst women who perceive motherhood as an area of ambivalence (Liamputtong et al., 2004; Parker, 1997; Weaver & Ussher, 1997). Some cite a strong sense of self-worth which stems from the way motherhood makes them feel important, needed and wanted, as well as prompting them to become less selfish,

more patient, mature, confident and responsible (Laney et al., 2013; Weaver & Ussher, 1997). For these mothers, the overpowering sense of love and involvement with their children, though less tangible, makes up for the negative aspects that exist (Wall, 2013; Weaver & Ussher, 1997). Interestingly, alongside frustration, mothers suffering from PPD express loving maternal selves that are often perceived as contradictory to their internalised notions of a failed mother as a result of their diagnosis (Abrams & Curran, 2010). This shows that the construction of identities in motherhood depends on individual motherhood experiences. Beyond these individual motherhood contexts, there are other 'macro' contexts that affect the ways mothers portray themselves. Some of these contexts will be explicated in the next two sub-sections: on 'good' motherhood and (a) career decisions; and (b) various cultural contexts.

(a) 'Good' motherhood and mothers' career decisions

As argued previously, mothers are subject to numerous societal pressures and expectations. One of the ways they construct themselves and are perceived as 'good' (or 'bad') mothers is through the career-role categories they belong to. Mothers' career decisions are inferred as one of the characteristics in the definition of a ''good' mother' by Goodwin and Huppatz (2010) presented earlier. According to Duberley and Carrigan (2012) and Hays (1996), women frequently face contradictory societal expectations when it comes to career decisions, success and motherhood. In her study, Wall (2013) found that perceptions of motherhood responsibilities and career paths were surprising in relation to recent efforts made towards gender equality. Although a loss of sense of self is arguably a common issue faced by many mothers regardless of their employment status, society still largely regards the roles and responsibilities of working mothers (WMs), mothers who go out to work, as potentially in conflict (Bailey, 2000). WMs, for instance, face an immediate contrast with intensive child-centred mothering styles that promote the idea that "the best child care is exclusively maternal" (Damaske, 2013; Hays, 1996; Ranson, 1999, p. 58). This belief is also contrary to the increased practice of shared childcare responsibilities among both parents. Hays (1996) aptly points out the tension inherent in a mother's career decision by positing that the more powerful the mother's position in the workforce, the more powerful the ideologies associated with intensive mothering are. Morehead (2001), nevertheless, argues that mothers typically think about their mothering responsibilities

wherever they are, and thus do not stop ‘mothering’ when at work. This phenomenon again stresses the idea of a lost sense of self as mothers, because regardless of circumstances, they are generally expected to give total devotion to their children (Duberly & Carrigan, 2012).

There are many more conflicts with regard to motherhood and the career decisions that mothers have to make. Some members of society view motherhood as a way of escaping the competition inherent in workplace hierarchies (Bailey, 2000). Some mothers themselves have expressed ambivalence towards the idea of employment, in favour of exclusively taking care of their children at home, “revealing a complex relationship between employment, depression and maternal identity” (Abrams & Curran, 2010, p. 378). For some WMs, they express sadness over having to return to work after childbirth, whilst viewing employment and its financial rewards as one of the many aspects of ideal motherhood (Abrams & Curran, 2010). Some WMs are caught in a conflict between the need to perform simultaneously as a worker and as a mother, and often endure gender discrimination in the workplace (Smyth, 2012). This shows that the main problem faced by mothers with young children involves role conflict, guilt, and the question of whether and how to juggle paid work alongside motherhood (Smyth, 2012). Goodwin and Huppatz (2010) also point out the emerging guilt that might consume WMs’ time and emotions because of the difficulty of negotiating contradictory identities in different domains. Indeed, the discourses of employment and the ‘‘good’ mother’ are often in conflict, since they are incompatible with the realities of WMs (Goodwin & Huppatz, 2010). I, therefore, agree with Smyth (2012) that discourses involving motherhood and career-role categories are very complex and context-dependent.

Stay-at-home mothers (SAHMs), i.e. mothers who fully take care of their children at home (Smyth, 2012), also face challenges, though in different ways. The choice to be a SAHM is generally considered ‘superior’ compared to other career decisions in many cultures, since many people perceive that a great deal of societal problems can be explained and resolved in terms of the quality of parental care in early childhood (Smyth, 2012). In the US, debates about motherhood show a normative preference for full-time mothering since maternal employment is generally frowned upon (Macdonald, 2011). In the so-called ‘mummy wars’, some SAHMs take pride in being

perceived as ‘helicopter mums’, who “hover over their infants in anticipation of their every need, providing physical and verbal affirmation at every opportunity in order to bolster the child’s confidence” (Smyth, 2012, p. 3). Many SAHMs, nevertheless, perceive motherhood as an inferior societal role and express frustration that they are regarded as doing ‘nothing’ by society. This perception reflects “the ways in which motherhood has been subject to social revaluation, no longer simply a traditional role which women can expect to perform unreflectively as a natural part of life, but instead has become an arena of meaningful social action” (Smyth, 2012, p. 112).

In relation to the challenges faced by both SAHMs and WMs, a fairly new career-role category, work-at-home mothers (WAHMs), has become increasingly popular. WAHMs are sometimes called ‘mumpreneurs’ as they typically run businesses from their own homes (Duberley & Carrigan, 2012). By definition, a ‘mumpreneur’ is an individual who aspires for “‘work-life harmony’ through an identity orientation that blurs the boundary between the roles of ‘mother’ and ‘businesswoman’” and views “business practices as a liberating and creative way of being both a ‘good mother’ and a successful (and even transformative) contributor to the ‘productive’ sphere” (Ekinsmyth, 2011, p. 104). Duberley and Carrigan (2012) reiterate that the identity of a WAHM is constructed through active engagement with existing and sometimes conflicting discourses regarding how WAHMs can overcome the conflicts felt by many WMs. This move towards WAHMs has its origins in the ‘‘good’ mother’ ideologies explained earlier which dictate that a ‘good’ mother is one who is fully committed to raising children at home. The ability to be a mumpreneur is evidently made easier by the accessibility of the Internet, which promotes flexibility in terms of time and place. This allows a growing number of new mothers to run their businesses from home, gaining flexibility of childcare and earning money (Thompson, Jones-Evans & Kwong, 2009). The relatively new career role of WAHM thus emerges out of the desire to have the best of ‘both worlds’ in trying to be a ‘good’ mother. The WAHM category offers a compromise for mothers in today’s society. The perception that mumpreneurship is the perfect solution to complex career-role decisions among mothers, however, may be misleading. A few scholars argue that mumpreneurs may actually face similar dilemmas to other types of mothers in the sense that there is a tendency for either their domestic or business role to be neglected (Duberley & Carrigan, 2012; Patterson & Mavin, 2009).

In Malaysia, the category of the WAHM has become an increasingly common career decision among mothers, even among those who have tertiary-level qualifications (Alexia, n.d.). This is unsurprising in Malaysia since many local employers fail to offer flexible working policies for women even though the number of Malaysian women who are educated up to tertiary levels is high ("75% of Malaysian", 2018; Tan et al., 2015). There are a few reports that indicate that many WMs in Malaysia still experience discriminatory behaviour in the workplace (Aditi Sharma, 2018; Irwan Nadzif & Nor Azaian, 2011), which drives many of them to explore other employment alternatives. Career-related conflicts have, in fact, pressured some WMs in Malaysia to leave their jobs altogether and become a SAHM, also addressing their concerns about poor childcare (Aditi Sharma, 2018). Based on several interviews carried out by Tang (2017) and a report by Malaysia's renowned social news company, SAYS, the 'mummy wars' in Malaysia are most centred on career decisions, with the three career-role categories reviewed so far are acknowledged to be the most common types of career decisions taken up by Malaysian mothers. Besides the influence of career decisions which reflect the salient role of socioeconomic contexts, there are also other sociocultural contexts which fundamentally shape the ways new mothers construct their identities as explained in the next sub-section.

(b) 'Good' motherhood and various cultural contexts

''Good' mother' discourses that impact upon identity construction are multifaceted which means that they are also realised differently in different sociocultural contexts. This statement is in line with the assertion of many scholars who claim that any preconceived notions of motherhood among new mothers must have been strongly influenced by the ideology of motherhood in their cultures (Austin & Carpenter, 2008; Choi et al., 2005). The ''good' mother' is perceived differently in different settings as "the accompanying expectations of mothers are in constant flux as they adapt to the changing socio-cultural context" (Porter & Kelso, 2008, p. xii). This implies that the ''good' mother' is a context-dependent and culturally-specific construct. In a study of new mothers in Thailand, distinctive motherhood experiences were observed to be specific to societal expectations of motherhood in Thai culture. All women in the study expressed completely positive perceptions of their motherhood experiences (Liamputtong et al., 2004). The positive experiences reported among the Thai mothers

may stem from Northern Thailand's female-centred system, in which motherhood is viewed as the ability to bring a new life into the matrilineal line of the family. This grants new Thai mothers a special status and treatment by family members and partners upon childbirth which immensely benefits them emotionally (Liamputtong et al., 2004). It must be noted that the negative experiences reported among new mothers in Euro-American societies were largely unheard of among new Thai mothers in the study. The marked difference between new mothers from Thailand and dominant research contexts illustrates that the constructions of motherhood identities are highly dependent on various societal and/or ethnicity-related differences. Since Phoenix (2010), similarly, emphasises the importance of ethnicities in the study of identities and how ethnicity-related identities represent "a story of change, contestation and debate" (p. 314), I too will attempt to explore how discourses of ethnicities intersect with 'good' motherhood discourses in the ways the participants construct and negotiate their identities in the data for this study (see Chapter 6 – section 6.2).

Another important cultural consideration in identity construction is religious discourses. Religious identity is a salient construct in many people's lives because it represents:

> … a discourse of boundaries, relatedness and otherness, on the one hand, and encompassment and inclusiveness on the other – and of the powerful forces that are perceived to challenge, contest and preserve these distinctions and unities.
>
> (Werbner, 2010, p. 233)

Werbner further asserts that religious identity "may be invoked to explain or legitimate conflicts between and within religious groups" (p. 233). When relating the salience of religious discourses and identities to motherhood, Oh (2010) posits that religious traditions reinforce idealistic expectations of motherhood to the point that mothers are often shocked with their own opposing lived experiences. In Christian and Islamic notions of motherhood, for instance, "mothers tend to be objectified as symbols of willing and selfless devotion" (Oh, 2010, p. 638). In Christianity, Mary is idealised as a selfless and tireless mother and "the epitome of maternal love" (John Paul II, 1987, as cited in Oh, 2010, p. 639). In a similar vein, the gap between idealised and realistic motherhood in Buddhism is highly visible (Hallisey, 1999, as cited in Oh, 2010).

In Islam, the religion professed by most participants in the current study, a mother's status is also glorified. One of the most frequently-cited Islamic quotations from the hadith, a sacred collection of texts that records the things said and done by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and his companions within the Islamic tradition (Speight, 2019), states that "paradise lies at the feet of the mother" (Wadud, 2006). This suggests that Muslims can only be granted paradise if they treat their mothers with love and respect. Canonical Islamic texts, in fact, tend to describe a mother as an object of profound respect; she must be respected and prioritised three times more than a father (Oh, 2010). In the Quran and *hadith*, exclusive mothering tasks like breastfeeding are described as deserving divine reward. For example, a mother who nurses "receives for every mouthful [of milk] and for every suck, the reward of one good deed. And if she is kept awake by her child at night, she receives the reward of one who frees seventy slaves for the sake of Allah" (Schleifer 1986, p. 53; Shakir, 2002). Besides Mary (known as 'Maryam' in Islam), Khadija, Prophet Muhammad's first wife, is often viewed by Muslims as an exemplary mother figure partly because she is the only one to have borne a child who survived Prophet Muhammad's death (Stowasser, 1994). Indeed, in both Christian and Muslim communities, children possess the unique status of being "social objects of great cultural worth" and carry "the symbolic power to transform women's identities" (McMahon 1995, p. 21; Oh, 2010, p. 651). I see the religious portrayal of mothers as consistent with some of the dominant ('good') motherhood discourses discussed earlier. Even though most religious depictions of motherhood acknowledge the difficulties of mothering, the unrealistically high standards depicted through the religious mother figures still broaden the gap between mothering expectations and lived realities. A focus on religious identities, hence, allows investigation of the complexities, intersections, differentiation and hierarchy in the construction of selves in and through various discourses (Werbner, 2010). The salience of religious discourses in the discursive construction of identities in motherhood within the collected data will be explored in Chapter 6 (see section 6.3).

Within the context of Malaysia, many Malaysian mothers from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds (Department of Statistics, 2018; Haziq, 2016) are, inescapably, exposed to various conflicting ''good' motherhood' discourses. The powerful role of today's mass and digital media also means that Malaysian mothers are daily exposed to motherhood ideals that depict diverse ''good' motherhood' discourses within their

own cultures and even those beyond their own. There is, thus, a dire need to understand how new mothers in Malaysia construct and negotiate their various identities within the inherently complex motherhood discourses in Malaysia and the extent to which media discourses, like the Internet, expand and/or constrain the ways they portray themselves. The diverse demographic contexts of the Malaysian participants in this study such as their career-related roles, ethnicities and religions, hence, are explicated in detail later in Chapter 3 (see section 3.6).

2.4 Recent developments in identity construction via media discourses (the Internet and social media)

In this section, I will relate the earlier arguments to literature about the significant impact of media discourses on identity construction, specifically the roles of the Internet and social media platforms.

Much of the literature of the last three decades highlights the differential power relations that naturally surface due to the 'one-sidedness' of mass media discourse(s) (Fairclough, 1989). Within the same source, Fairclough points out that power relations are often unclear and sometimes hidden. In media discourses, there is generally a stark division between their 'producers' and 'interpreters' (Fairclough, 1989). However, Fairclough's assertion in the late 1980s did not take into account the presence and role of the Internet, within which media discourses, particularly social media discourses, may be starkly different. Social media offer numerous avenues for the 'producer' to know- and interact with - the 'audience', and adapt and respond to that audience. This observation is supported by Wood (2010) who postulates that the new media forms we see today offer two-way interactivity and, thus, become routinely involved in the construction of identities. Identity construction, ergo, has become more public and complex through the various forms of computer-mediated communication (CMC) available on the Internet. The Internet, in fact, has become a 'mundane' and routine space that occupies the lives of many people (Barnes, 2003, as cited in Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). Through the Internet, society has become more open about social roles and norms, and aware of the myriad struggles inherent in increasingly complex contexts (Smyth, 2012). This phenomenon, therefore, necessarily affects the ways identities are constructed today. This shift in terms of the avenues people use to portray

themselves reflects the 'virtual turn' in the fields of discourse and identity (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). I see identities constructed via the Internet as powerful because the producers have the rights to specifically determine what appears on their web pages, unlike other more passive media channels. The Internet has facilitated the transformation of 'orders of discourse', allowing a heightened capacity for people to act upon and shape the discourses of others over significant distances of space and time (Fairclough, 2003).

In terms of motherhood, the Internet offers contemporary women in the modern world a wider range of opportunities, allowing them to construct their identities as mothers in diverse ways (Goodwin & Huppatz, 2010; Smyth, 2012). Research has in fact suggested that most of today's parents, specifically first-time mothers, use the Internet to seek both information and social support (Plantin & Daneback, 2009). Besides the use of the search engine, specifically dedicated websites for parents are also used as places where they can socialise and explore a wide range of topics (Plantin & Daneback, 2009). Other forms of web platforms for new mothers are social network services (SNSs) such as discussion boards and blogs, through which new mothers make themselves visible (Kaufmann & Buckner, 2014). A question arises as to why these new mothers resort to the Internet as an alternative source of support and platform for the expression of self? The possible factors can be summed up as follows: living without a partner, changing circumstances of parenthood, increased risk awareness, a reduction of support from families and friends, the need for up-to-date information, seeking reassurance about children's behaviour, having low education and income levels, and accessibility (Kaufmann & Buckner, 2014; Plantin & Daneback, 2009). It is of no surprise, therefore, that many new mothers are making full use of the many features of online communication to have their previously ignored voices and experiences heard.

The Internet is also a very appealing source for communication and information on motherhood because of the elements of companionship and sameness that many new mothers are seeking. According to Plantin and Daneback (2009), the Internet offers a vital and interactive source of support for new mothers who need tips and encouragement from people whose situations are similar to their own. These preferences among new mothers parallel the academic literature on contemporary

motherhood which claims that motherhood is currently compromised by the explosion of scientific and alternative anti-scientific information, sometimes by self-proclaimed 'experts', typically mothers themselves (Smyth, 2012). Some of the websites catering to this interest are 'NetMums', 'Mumsnet' (Mackenzie, 2016) and 'MomsLikeMe' (Smyth, 2012). Smyth further asserts that these online communities provide an important arena where expressions of normative commitments and authority can be openly made and recognised by fellow new mothers. This shows that today's new mothers are no longer satisfied with merely scientific-based information about parenthood. Plantin and Daneback (2009) claim that communicative online platforms relieve the common feeling of isolation, facilitate the maintenance of emotional connections and foster discussion of parental issues, such as disputes over childcare, parental conflicts and sleeping problems, which are inherent among new mothers. There are even websites that promote deviancy from traditional ''good' motherhood' ideologies by normalising ''bad' motherhood' images, hence signifying the Internet as a platform on which ''good' mother' ideals are produced and challenged (Goodwin & Huppatz, 2010). The use of the Internet, therefore, signifies a place of choice and freedom among new mothers who use it as a strategy to cope with a range of conflicts in motherhood (Smyth, 2012).

Although the Internet is an important medium of communication, information and support among some new mothers, it does not come without risk. Through the Internet, images of mothers and their mothering decisions proliferate the public domain, thus displaying a multiplicity of motherhood ideals that feed on society's tendency to constantly evaluate mothers (Goodwin & Huppatz, 2010). Moreover, despite being the first point of reference for some new mothers, the infinite amount of information on the Internet may mean that parents are exposed to misleading ideas about childcare (Plantin & Daneback, 2009). This may influence the ways in which motherhood identities are constructed among new mothers. The very nature of CMC means that misunderstandings may easily occur. Just like any communication platforms on the Internet, the risk that people are disrespectful and disruptive of communication is always there (Plantin & Daneback, 2009). This is very likely to happen among opinionated mothers who are advocates of different parenting approaches. Sometimes they argue about issues with their 'opponents' on the Internet, especially on highly-debated issues that closely align to what it means to be a ''good' mother', like

breastfeeding, thus leading to anxiety (Brookes et al., 2017; Smyth, 2012). Despite being mitigated by 'netiquette', there are increasing pressures on mothers in relation to online childcare 'experts' (Plantin & Daneback, 2009; Smyth, 2012). In fact, it is asserted that the foundation of appropriate mothering has shifted from being viewed as an innate ability to being a skill that requires extensive knowledge and training (Apple, 2006). These pressures mean that, despite the Internet being a powerful means of providing new mothers with virtual social support in their identity transition to motherhood, the Internet is still perceived as a lesser form of support compared with face-to-face meetings (Plantin & Daneback, 2009; Smyth, 2012). This justifies the need for this study to use the digital data to complement the interview data in unpacking the processes of identity construction among new mothers in Malaysia.

There are many social support groups on the Internet, but the ones that mostly attract new mothers are social media platforms (DeCesare, 2016; Kaufmann & Buckner, 2014). In fact, as suggested previously, mothers have emerged as one of the top demographics for social media use (DeCesare, 2016). This observation parallels the increasing study of social media data among discourse analysts (Baran, 2018). Facebook, for example, is an appealing avenue for communication among mothers because its multimodal features promote a sense of community and facilitate conversations about motherhood issues in various ways (Kaufmann & Buckner, 2014). The features of most social media platforms also allow users to edit and re-evaluate their posts and narratives (Austin & Carpenter, 2008). Such features on social media satisfy the increasing need among mothers to 'publicise' and justify their mothering decisions, therefore supporting the premise that motherhood has become a site of agency despite prevailing incongruent motherhood ideologies (Smyth, 2012). The specific features of social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram, which are analytically salient in this research, will be illustrated in the ensuing Chapter 3 (see section 3.7.2).

Similar to the generic use of the Internet, there are some possible problems that are inherent in the ways mothers discursively portray themselves on social media, which lead to frustration amongst social media users and misrepresentations of motherhood. The intense 'wars' about childcare and mothering practices which can add unnecessary pressure to new mothers (Smyth, 2012) are mostly observed on various

platforms on social media. Unfortunately, little research regarding the discursive construction of identities in motherhood exists (Kaufmann & Buckner, 2014), particularly research that includes the neglected communicative context of social media and within the under-researched setting of Malaysia. This discernible absence in literature warrants a discourse analytical study on the construction of identities among new mothers in face-to-face verbal *and* social media communication. It is believed that this study will be able to foster more multimodal work in the research areas of identity, discourse and motherhood.

2.5 Establishing the research gap

This chapter has reviewed relevant literature in identity research. This field of study has witnessed a shift towards a discursive understanding of identities and the ways they are constructed, a view that is similarly adopted in this research. The studies reviewed have also illuminated the implications for researching discursive construction of identities among women and new mothers, including the salient role of social media. The chapter has, thus, established the research gap: to the best of my knowledge, there are currently no studies that take a discourse analytical approach to capture the processes of identity construction and negotiation among new mothers in the socio-culturally complex setting of Malaysia, using combined data sources that include social media. The current study aims to fill and explore this research gap, contributing further to the fields of discourse and identity studies. In the ensuing chapter, I will reiterate the paradigmatic theoretical position of this study along with other specificities with regards to the data and methods.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I outline the research design of this study which includes the paradigmatic position, and the theoretical and analytical framework. I then explain my role as the researcher in this study. Next, I briefly report on the pilot study conducted and discuss the ethical considerations of this research. This is followed by detailed descriptions of the participants, data collection methods and data analysis processes. The chapter ends with some concluding remarks on all aspects pertaining to the methodology of this research.

3.2 Research design

This study employs an in-depth qualitative research design. This is in keeping with the paradigmatic position this study takes, as set out in the previous chapter earlier, and is further iterated below.

3.2.1 Paradigmatic position

Approaches to qualitative research are typically guided by an interpretivist paradigm which views reality as subjective and socially constructed (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005; Merriam, 2009), and this perspective is adopted in this research. Within interpretivism, the approaches of constructivism and social constructionism (which are often subsumed under the undifferentiated term 'constructivism') are widely used in the social sciences (Young & Collin, 2004). With regards to terminology, I propose it is important to differentiate between 'constructivism' and 'social constructionism' because social constructionism argues that "knowledge is sustained by social processes and that knowledge and social action go together", whilst constructivism is more interested in the individual and cognitive processes that accompany knowledge (Young & Collin, 2004, p. 376).

As elucidated in the previous chapter, the social constructionist approach is markedly different from an essentialist perspective, which views identity as a fixed and discoverable entity (Angouri, 2015; Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). This study takes a

social constructionist stance, underscoring the importance of discourse in constructing identities (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; PAD Research Group, 2016; Wolfers, File & Schnurr, 2017). A social constructionist perspective is apt in the context of the present research because the new mothers socially and continuously negotiate various mothering beliefs and experiences through interactions. This perspective is also commensurate with many of the constructivist theories employed in previous research on motherhood discourses (Choi et al., 2005; Duberley & Carrigan, 2012; Laney et al., 2014; Liamputtong et al., 2004; Wall, 2013; Weaver & Ussher, 1997; Yulindrasari & McGregor, 2011).

A qualitative approach is necessary in identity research because it assists the understanding of how people express their experiences and the meanings they attribute to these experiences in discourses (Merriam, 2009). In fact, qualitative methodologies are particularly useful in the study of identity because they place fewer restrictions on individuals and allow the nuances of their experiences to surface (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I should also clarify that this study has no interest in making generalised claims based on any of the data obtained, as it is the underlying meanings of the phenomenon that is of importance. The qualitative nature of this study is also in line with most previous research on motherhood discourses (Choi et al., 2005; Duberley & Carrigan, 2012; Laney et al., 2014; Liamputtong et al., 2004; Wall, 2013; Weaver & Ussher, 1997; Yulindrasari & McGregor, 2011). This study extends previous works by taking a critical qualitative approach, aiming not just to understand the participants and related contexts but to provide a critical interpretation of the construction of identities, as well as elements of power dynamics that might be involved (Merriam, 2009) within the new mothers' interactions.

To offer a critical analysis of the participants' identity constructions, this research adopts discourse analysis (DA) to analyse the data. DA is a generic term referring to a linguistic analysis of text that takes into account sociocultural linguistic contexts and "takes us beyond description to explanation and helps us understand the 'rules of the game' that language users draw on in their everyday spoken and written interactions" (Paltridge, 2012, p. 12; Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Such an approach corresponds with the analysis of data in this study, namely participants' interactions in everyday life.

The specific branch of DA that this study adopts as its theoretical and analytical framework is further explained in the next section.

3.2.2 Theoretical and analytical framework

This study is underpinned by a combination of Baxter's (2007) *Feminist Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis* (FPDA), Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) *five sociocultural linguistic principles of identity construction* and Schippers' (2007) concept of *hegemonic femininities*. These scholars and their respective works have been outlined in the previous chapter, but the specific principles and concepts pertinent to the analysis of data in this study warrant further explanation.

(a) Analytical framework for discourse and gender: Baxter's (2007) Feminist Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis (FPDA)

This study is guided by the theories of FPDA (Baxter, 2007), recognising gender as a potential source of struggle. Given that the participants in this study are exclusively new mothers, this approach is prudent. In terms of discourse analysis, FPDA draws upon an interplay between 'micro'- and 'macro'-analysis (Baxter, 2010) and distinguishes between two levels of micro-analysis:

> (i) *denotative* – interactions are described in close detail but not in an evaluative way. The descriptions often focus on the linguistic and semantic properties of the words, phrases and structures, as well as annotations of the contextual meanings of the utterances which may not be readily understood by the reader. This level is a prerequisite to a more hollistic understanding of interactions, i.e. the *connotative* interpretations;
>
> (ii) *connotative* – data are interpreted at a broader discursive level, focusing more on the pragmatics of the interactions. For example, an analysis of interactions may look at the ways in which speakers are persistently jockeying for positions of power according to conflicting and intertextualised discourses.
>
> (Baxter, 2010).

As the definition suggests, the *connotative* interpretation involves the concepts of *intertextuality*, and the relations and positions of *powerfulness-powerlessness*. *Intertextuality* is important in this study as the concept foregrounds and emphasises how "the dominant discourses within any speech context are always inflected and inscribed with traces of other discourses", which means that discourses are always operating intertextually (Baxter, 2007). Within intertextuality, 'interdiscursivity' – often viewed as a 'special' kind of intertextuality - is also relevant. Interdiscursivity refers to the propensity of texts to be a mix of other texts which may be "demarcated or merged in, and which the text may assimilate, contradict, ironically echo, and so forth" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 84). More simply, interdiscursivity is the "hybridisation of one genre or text-type with another" (Bloor and Bloor 2007; as cited in Jones, Chik & Hafner, 2015, p. 66). How this notion is significant in the findings will be explicated in the Discussion chapter. The *powerfulness* and *powerlessness* continuum, which is also mentioned in the definition of the *connotative* level, points out in more detail the ways in which speakers position themselves and are positioned in terms of power (Baxter, 2007). It must be acknowledged, however, that the *powerful* and *powerless* categories are very much dependent on my subjective interpretations as the researcher of this study. The distinction between *denotative* and *connotative* analysis also supports the identification of salient identities at both the 'micro' and 'macro' level. These two levels, thus, guide the analysis of all selected data in the second phase of this study (see section 3.8 and Figure 3.3).

To clarify, the *synchronic* and *diachronic* levels of analysis, which aim to capture discursive power shifts at specific points of an interaction and over a time period, respectively (Baxter, 2007), are not appropriate as an analytical framework for the current study, as explained in the previous chapter (see section 2.2.2). This is due to the fact that this is not a longitudinal study and that none of the data collected are of an ongoing nature, though the consideration of 'past selves' and 'present selves' in the analysis does provide a limited *diachronic* perspective. Employing the *connotative* level of analysis, however, still supports the analysis of shifting power positions in interactions through the *powerfulness-powerlessness* axis that is also key in *synchronic* analysis, as illustrated by its definition earlier (Baxter, 2007). In short, by incorporating the *denotative-connotative* analysis, this study is still able to analyse data in terms of competing power relations over time. I will engage with these power

relations by looking at specific points in the offline and online interactions in which the participants are positioned or position themselves as relatively *powerful* and/or *powerless* at the *connotative* level of analysis, where relevant. The concepts of FPDA, which emphasise the critical analysis of language, power and intertextualised discourses, may also point to the inevitability of discussing categories altogether in identity construction processes. FDPA advocates critical discussion of how these categories come to be constituted and conceptualised by the interactants, and offer some non-static interpretations of the processes. Despite the benefits of employing FPDA as a theoretical and analytical framework, there remains a need for an approach that specifically considers the processes involved in identity construction.

(b) Framework for discourse and identity: Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) five sociocultural linguistic principles of identity construction

To analyse identity construction work, especially at the *connotative* level of data analysis, Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) five sociocultural linguistic principles of identity construction complement FPDA well. The principles are chosen as part of the theoretical and analytical framework because they reflect the view that identity is the social positioning of self and others, and is constructed *in* and *through* discourse (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). In essence, the framework focuses on "both the details of language and the workings of culture and society" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 585). This emphasis aligns with this study's paradigmatic position, the concepts of FPDA and my aim to decipher the processes of identity construction among new mothers in their social interactions. Hence, I believe that Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) sociocultural linguistic principles can help form a more solid theoretical and analytical framework for this identity study. The five principles are: "emergence; positionality; indexicality; relationality; and partialness" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 586).

The first principle, *emergence*, highlights the fact that identity is emergent and realised in sociocultural actions through some form of discourse (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Through this principle, identity is not viewed as "the pre-existing source of linguistic and other semiotic practices" but rather, the emergent product "and therefore as fundamentally a social and cultural phenomenon" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 588). This understanding of identity corresponds to the perspective of this study, which

seeks to consider how identity is emergent via various discourses within new mothers' interactions. However, since *emergence* represents the basic understanding of identity, i.e. all identities are indeed emergent (which is also applicable in the other four principles), it may be too generic to be employed as an analytical framework for this study. The principle may not offer specific ways through which the many nuances of identity construction processes in the different modes of interactions can be understood.

The second principle is *positionality,* which emphasises the incorporation of local positionings, both ethnographic and interactional (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). More specifically, Bucholtz and Hall (2005) posit that identities encompass "(a) macro-level demographic categories; (b) local, ethnographically specific cultural positions; and (c) temporary and interactionally specific stances and participant roles" (p. 592). Since new mothers' identities are constructed differently depending on various demographic, ethnographic, cultural and interactional contexts, this principle is highly relevant to this study.

The third principle, *indexicality*, stresses the idea that identity is *indexically* produced via linguistic resources (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). An index is "a linguistic form that depends on the interactional context for its meaning" (Silverstein, 1976, as cited in Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 594) from as specific as the use of first-person pronoun *I* and to as broad as "the creation of semiotic links between linguistic forms and social meanings" (Ochs, 1992, as cited in Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 594). Because this principle offers multiple ways of understanding how identities are constructed, i.e. through overt mentioning of categories, implicatures and presupposition, evaluative and epistemic orientations to ongoing talk, and the use of specific linguistic structures (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), it will add more depth to the analysis of data in this study.

The fourth principle is *relationality* which states that identities are "intersubjectively constructed through several, often overlapping, complementary relations including similarity/difference, genuine/artifice and authority/delegitimacy" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 598). As the name of the principle suggests, identities can only be constructed in *relation* to other identities within the contingent interactional framework (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). The relation of 'similarity/difference', which is more aptly termed

'*adequation and distinction*' by Bucholtz and Hall, looks at how individuals position themselves as alike or different within their interactions with others. Bucholtz and Hall also explicate the relation of 'genuine/artifice' as '*authentication and denaturalisation*' which helps explain "the processes by which speakers make claims to realness and artifice, respectively" (p. 601). The last pair of identity relations, 'authority/delegitimacy', is termed '*authorisation and illegitimisation*' which encompasses the ways through which identities are affirmed and imposed through structures of institutionalised power and ideology, and conversely, the ways identities are rejected by these very structures (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). The *relationality* principle, hence, is crucial in the analysis of data in the current study as it offers a clearer and broader range of identity relations through which people's intersubjective constructions of identities can be unpacked.

The last principle, *partialness*, underscores the idea that identity is realised in many ways, from deliberate to habitual, interactional, representative, and ideological practices, as interactions unfold across discourse contexts (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Apparently, this principle views identities in an integrated way. Although this principle reflects the ideal aim of this study – to provide detailed descriptions of identity construction from every possible angle - it has too broad a scope to be realised in full in this thesis, with data that were collected within a relatively short period of time. Considering its temporal and spatial limitations, employing this principle for the current study is not regarded as practical.

All in all, Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) five sociocultural linguistic principles are chosen for this study's theoretical framework because of their holistic view of identity as intersubjectively and interactionally emergent. Preliminary data analysis on interviews with nine of the participants supports the employment of only three of the principles, namely, the *indexicality, positionality* and *relationality* principles as the study's analytical framework. Overall, the distinctive dimensions in each of the concepts in Baxter's (2007) FPDA and Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) sociocultural linguistic principles of identity construction fit the direction of this study, together forming its core theoretical and analytical framework. The next sub-section explicates the additional framework that is employed in this study.

(c) Framework for hegemonic gender and motherhood: Schippers' (2007) concept of hegemonic femininities

For certain parts of the analysis, the concept of 'hegemonic femininities' proposed by Schippers (2007) is also found to be relevant. As briefly reviewed in Chapter 2, the term 'hegemonic femininities' refers to the characteristics that are described as womanly which legitimate and perpetuate men's dominance over women (Schippers, 2007). Similar to the concept of hegemonic masculinities, hegemonic femininities can be identified and researched at three levels: *local*, *regional* and *global* (Schippers, 2007). Based on relevant studies that employed these levels of analysis (Schippers, 2007; Schnurr et al., 2016), I understand *local* level discourses as those which are more specific and contingent on specific interactional and social contexts. I see the *regional* level as involving relatively more distinctive discourses associated with certain geographical and sociocultural contexts, whilst the *global* level tends to be discourses that are relevant to different societies across the world. I, however, acknowledge that these levels do not always operate independently and, in fact, often overlap with one another, an observation that is in line with the non-essentialist paradigm of this research. These three levels can help explain gender-related power imbalances that give rise to certain ''good' motherhood' discourses. For example, when analysing the data that closely relate to gender issues, I scrutinise instances in which the participants reinforce or challenge the gender order at the varying *local*, *regional* and/or *global* levels. I also revisit and problematise the ways these three levels operate in the discussion chapter (see sections 7.3 and 7.5). Also, in line with work by Schnurr et al. (2016) which demonstrates the significance of context in the negotiation of what it means to be 'womanly', I use the concept of hegemonic femininities to more specifically understand the discursive contexts that shape the notion of 'motherly' among my participants. As such, I link the concept of hegemonic femininities to the more specific notion of hegemonic motherhood (Arendell, 1999; Goodwin & Huppatz, 2010), as explained in Chapter 2, where relevant. Schippers' (2007) concept of hegemonic femininities, therefore, is especially relevant in the analysis of gender and power issues, particularly in Chapter 5. The relationships between the selected concepts within the three selected frameworks, and how they work together in the analysis of data in this research, are depicted in section 3.8 later (see Figure 3.3).

3.3 Roles of the researcher

As a researcher who is also a mother, I need to acknowledge my own experiences, personal prejudices and assumptions (Merriam, 2009) in carrying out this research. As indicated in Chapter 1, this research topic was initially motivated by my own challenging experiences as a new mother who was (and still is) actively communicating my own motherhood journey and other general motherhood issues in my daily verbal and social media interactions. I acknowledge that biased judgments may arise from my position as a mother of two boys who identifies as a Malay, Muslim and a WM (when I was in Malaysia). As a researcher, I strive to set aside my prior and possibly biased viewpoints (Merriam, 2009) to unpack the underlying meanings of my participants' motherhood experiences and beliefs. During the data collection process, I tried to remain neutral during interviews and not reveal my own stance on any topics of conversation. Nonetheless, I acknowledge that meaning is inescapably co-constructed in this study's interviews (Holliday, 2012). In terms of data analysis, I agree with the "value [of] self-reflexivity on the analyst's part" and acknowledge "the impossibility of impartial research" (Litosseliti, 2006, pp. 54-55; Mann, 2016). I, thus, regard my position as a Malaysian mother and an active social media user as an added advantage in conducting this research. Such 'insider' knowledge is useful since a researcher can better make sense of the meanings of texts if he or she understands the research contexts (Paltridge, 2012). Overall, this research takes a reflexive stance in acknowledging my own roles and the inevitable impact that these will have on the processes and outcomes of this project (Mann, 2016).

3.4 Pilot study

A pilot study for this research was conducted with three new Malaysian mothers. Data were collected via interviews and Facebook posts, in March 2016. Generally, the pilot data collection processes went well, with some minor problems. There were some difficulties with participant selection, setting the exact time and date for the interviews, as well as time differences (because I conducted one of the interviews over Skype from the UK), interview settings, my interviewing skills, problematic questions, interview duration (too short or too long), the mode of the interview (face-to-face, Skype, online messenger), technical problems, transcribing, time constraints, Facebook data presentation and the anonymisation of participants' data. These

problems were consequently addressed in collecting and analysing the data for this study through: improved time management, efficient data collection, strategic planning and proofreading.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the University of Warwick and the Centre for Applied Linguistics (CAL). All stages of the study - participant selection, confidentiality, the option to withdraw, participants' sense of privacy and dignity within the research site, data collection, analysis and presentation - adhere to the ethical regulations set forth by CAL. Informed consent was obtained for three groups of participants: (i) participants who undertook interviews; (ii) participants who consented to the collection of their social media data (Facebook and/or Instagram posts); and (iii) participants who were not directly involved in the study but whose social media data might have appeared in selected participants' social media posts (see Appendix 1 for the consent forms). These consent procedures were approved by CAL prior to the data collection commencing in July 2016. Ultimately, it was found that it was not necessary to seek consent from the third group of participants since their data did not appear in the study. The relevant consent form, therefore, is not included in Appendix 1. Moreover, only new mothers willing to participate in the research were selected as research participants and this was clearly laid out in the consent form. One of the participants (Lippy Morgan) provided partial consent for the collection of her social media data (she only allowed her Facebook posts to be used for this research, not her posts on her more private Instagram account). The consent forms for undertaking the interviews were given to the participants before the interviews took place whilst the consent forms for the collection of social media data were given after the interviews. I have undertaken to delete participants' real names, replace them with pseudonyms, and delete their profile and personal pictures (of themselves and other people involved that may give way to their identities), in order to protect their anonymity. I also made sure that the people that I hired for transcribing the audio recordings of interviews did not know the identities of the participants prior to the job assignment. In terms of data security, all collected data were kept on the researcher's hard drive in a locked office and Warwick's secure online drive, and password protected; they will be stored for ten years subsequent to data collection and then

destroyed. It is hoped that these considerations will support future researchers in relevant fields to make well-considered ethical judgements that minimise harm to the participants.

3.6 Participants and sampling methods

The participants for this study consist of new Malaysian mothers from different backgrounds who were living in Malaysia during the period of data collection. As introduced in Chapter 2, existing literature on motherhood has largely been examined only from the dominant Australasian, European and North American cultural perspectives (Liamputtong et al., 2004), thus it was decided to consider motherhood discourses from Malaysia to address this research gap. In Malaysia, the majority of Internet users are active on social media ("Kantar TNS", 2016). Moreover, mothers with children under five years old tend to use social media most often (Strange, 2013). Therefore, only Malaysian mothers who have children under five years old have been chosen for this study. The finding from Strange (2013) also rationalises the decision to include not only first-time mothers as it is the number of years the women have become mothers (whether they are new to motherhood or more experienced) that are reported to be salient, not the number of children.

Younger people are the demographic most active on social media, so it was decided to focus on 'young' new mothers in particular. The definition of 'young' comes from the Ministry of Youth and Sports Malaysia, who defines 'youth' as between the ages of 15 and 40 ("National Youth Development", 1997). Another inclusion criterion for sample selection was that the new mothers must be Facebook and/or Instagram users with at least three motherhood-related posts in the six months of the data collection period. This was to ensure that the participants did have active Facebook and/or Instagram account(s) and occasionally posted something related to motherhood on their page(s). This was identified through an observation of the participants' social media accounts prior to data collection.

This study employed a mix of purposive, snowball and random sampling methods in an attempt to reflect the diverse demographics of Malaysia in the selection of participants. Purposive and snowball sampling methods are in line with many previous scholarly studies on motherhood discourses (Duberley & Carrigan, 2012;

Liamputtong et al., 2004). The sampling methods allow for a consideration of social media accounts, in that potential participants' profiles can be thoroughly checked to see if they fit the sampling inclusion criteria. I first purposely approached a few new mothers who fit the criteria within my own and/or my friends' Facebook and/or Instagram networks. Permission from the prospective participants was sought privately via the Facebook and/or Instagram messaging features or WhatsApp application. Some of the purposively selected participants later suggested their friends whom they thought would be suitable participants for my study.

Random sampling was later deemed necessary as an additional method of sourcing participants after initially failing to find any participants who were stay-at-home mothers (SAHMs) via the purposive and snowball sampling methods. Following this unforeseen circumstance, I posted a call for participants (CfP) on my own Facebook account and set the post to 'public' to enable any of my Facebook 'friends' to share it to the wider public. The CfP is as follows:

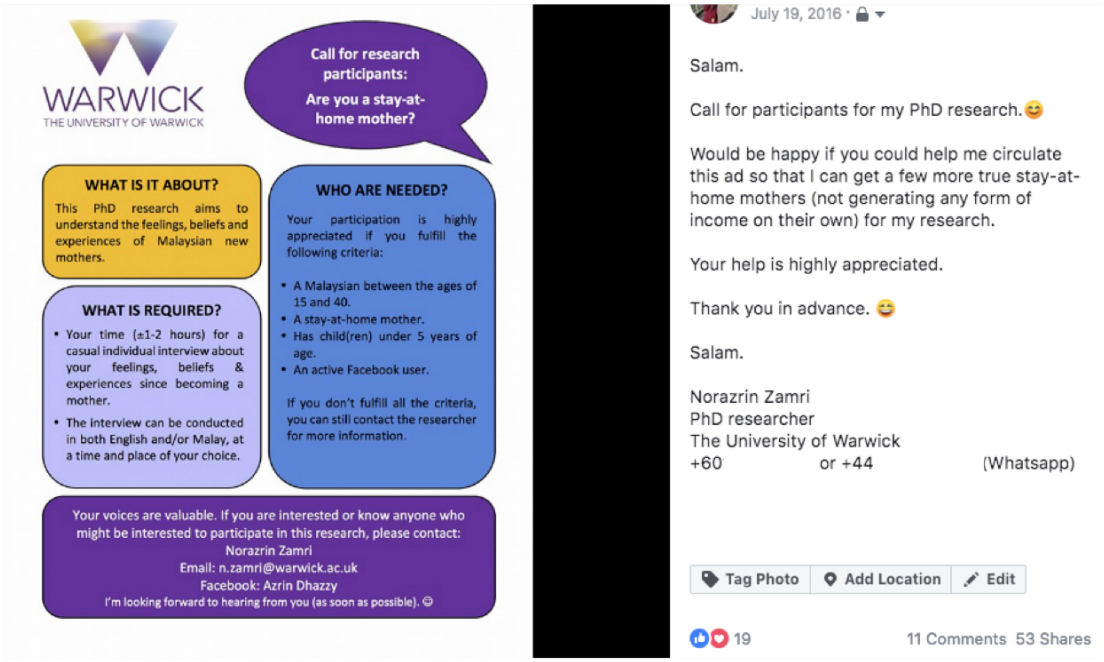


Figure 3.1 Call for participants (CfP) on Facebook

As is evident from Figure 3.1, the CfP post was shared by the social circle on my Facebook account 53 times. The response to the advertisement was indeed overwhelming and more interested SAHMs than needed contacted me directly through my Facebook account or via my WhatsApp number. Almost all selected SAHM participants were sourced this way and no other participants from the other two career-

role categories were selected using this particular method. However, there were a few participants who were suggested randomly by non-participants who read the CfP. In addition, one woman who was not a SAHM but fit other inclusion criteria, in fact, volunteered to be participants themselves upon reading the CfP and was eventually included as one of the study's WAHM participants. I note that the initial difficulty of sourcing SAHMs (and the relative ease of selecting mothers from other career categories), points to a possibly interesting finding about career decisions in Malaysia (see Chapter 5).

After about 90 days of recruitment (between mid-July 2016 and early September 2016), the final participants for this study consisted of nineteen (19) women who fit the inclusion criteria. The following Table 3.1 provides detailed demographic information about each of the participants (at the time of data collection) which I see as relevant in the context of my research, as well as their given code and pseudonyms.

Table 3.1 Participants' demographic information

No.	Pseudonym	Age	(Origin/ location)	Race	Religion	Chil-dren	Edu-cation	[Previous work]/ Current work
WM								
A1	Jasmin (J)	32	WM/ WM	Malay	Muslim	2	TESOL	English teacher
A2	Lippy Morgan (LM)	32	WM/ WM	Malay	Muslim	1	Accoun-ting	Banker
A3	Kiran (K)	31	WM/ WM	Indian	Hindu	2	TESOL	English lecturer
A4	Cathy (C)	32	EM/WM	Chinese	Christian	1	TESOL	Office work
A5	Hana (H)	27	WM/ WM	Malay	Muslim	1	Manage-ment & business	Teaching assistant
A6	Eva (E)	29	EM/EM	Kenyah-Melanau	Christian	1	TESL	English teacher
A7	Bernice (B)	32	EM/EM	Sino-Kadazan	Christian	1	TESOL	English teacher
WAHM								
B1	Mira (M)	27	WM/ WM	Malay	Muslim	2	Public adminis-tration	Online interior designer
B2	Ain (A)	31	WM/ WM	Malay	Muslim	2	TESOL	Online book seller
B3	Sarah (S)	32	WM/ WM	Malay	Muslim	2	TESOL	Online doll maker
B4	Nadia (N)	30	WM/ WM	Malay	Muslim	2	Bio-industrial science	Online supple-ment seller
B5	Faz (F)	32	WM/ WM	Malay	Muslim	1	Accoun-ting & finance	Business woman
SAHM								
C1	Intan (I)	32	WM/ WM	Malay	Muslim	3	Enginee-ring	[Lecturer]
C2	Zara (Z)	28	WM/ WM	Malay	Muslim	2	Law	[News presenter]
C3	Tasha (T)	30	EM/WM	Suluk	Muslim	1	Law	[Practising lawyer]
C4	Yaya (Y)	29	WM/ WM	Malay	Muslim	2	TESOL	[English teacher]
C5	Dyana (D)	31	WM/EM	Malay	Muslim	2	Quantity surveying	[Invest-ment property]
C6	Vera (V)	32	WM/EM	Chinese	Buddhist	1	Business admin.	[Brand manager]
C7	Qisya (Q)	29	WM/ WM	Malay	Muslim	1	Media studies	[Custom-er service staff]

These nineteen women were interviewed and their motherhood-related Facebook and/or Instagram posts were collected. Table 3.1 shows that in terms of career decisions, there are unequal numbers of participants from each career category:

a) 7 working new mothers (WM);
b) 5 work-at-home new mothers (WAHM);
c) 7 stay-at-home new mothers (SAHM).

In terms of sample size, the rather small sample size indicates that "the research is an illustrative, not a representative, study aimed at sketching out some of the parameters of the women's discourse rather than making definitive claims about mothers" (Bailey, 2000, p. 57). Furthermore, although an equal distribution of the sample is often found unimportant in a qualitative study (Merriam, 2014), I would like to note that I initially planned to have an equal number of participants from each career group (five participants from each group). Upon realising during recruitment that that this would be impractical as these categories do not always work out clearly, I decided to finalise these nineteen participants for my study. The subjective meanings of the different career-related categories, nonetheless, mean that I need to clarify the operationalised definitions for these categories in this study:

(a) WM: mothers who work full-time outside the home, receive pre-determined income and are subject to regulations and expectations from external working institutions with relatively less control over their work;

(b) WAHM: mothers who generate income from home through personal and/or impersonal unregistered and/or registered businesses without pre-determined or expected working hours by an external institution and without having to regularly leave their children under the care of someone else. They have a relatively more flexible working schedule and can fully work from home, if needed; and

(c) SAHM: mothers who do not generate any form of income on their own, are fully dependent on their husbands as breadwinners and fully take care of their own children in domestic settings.

For all these career-related categories, the level of income that these participants receive either from their own official work outside or inside the home and/or from their spouses and their personal and/or family wealth is considered less salient and was not a criterion for sampling. This is because the participants were mostly sourced through purposive and snowball methods within my social network as the researcher,

and thus come from either middle or upper-middle class socioeconomic groups with insignificant economic differences. Furthermore, all the participants live in either urban or suburban settings with not only easy access to basic facilities, but also to supplementary facilities like smartphones, computers and the Internet.

The rationale behind selecting mothers from different career-role categories has been partially explicated earlier in Chapter 2. Nevertheless, I would like to clarify here that the selection of participants according to these categories neither reflects this study's positivist nor oversimplified understanding of identities. The decision actually stems from the idea that "prejudice against other social groups is a widespread feature of social life" (Bloor & Bloor, 2007, p. 128). Bloor and Bloor continue to explain that prejudice is one aspect of group solidarity that is largely inspired by fear of the unfamiliar, of difference and of change. Prejudice can surface in many ways, and one such way, as this study aims to point out, is via the mothering decisions new mothers make. Within the Malaysian context, most judgments towards mothers are made on the basis of their career-related decisions (Indramalar, 2017) which I see as reflective of the current socio-economic demands in Malaysian culture, as well as a mother's priorities in life. As previously explained in Chapter 2, the decision to select participants from these three career-role categories is also validated by several studies that have reported the prevalence of these career roles among Malaysian mothers (Irwan Nadzif & Nor Azaian, 2011; Tang, 2017). This decision is further strengthened by the fact that all participants in this study described themselves as belonging to either the WM, WAHM or SAHM category (and occasionally, more than one of these categories). These studies, along with Bloor and Bloor (2007) also provide evidence for the prevalence of prejudice in ''good' motherhood' discourses which leads to various stereotypes of what makes a ''good' mother' based on career decisions. For all these reasons, the decision to select participants according to their career-related roles is justified. In fact, career decisions represent one of the salient contextual aspects that allows investigation of intra-gender differences, which problematises this study and lends itself to an FPDA approach. The following Table 3.2 summarises how all nineteen participants were recruited:

Table 3.2 Participants' sampling methods

Approached	Suggested by selected participants	Facebook CfP advertisement	Volunteered	Suggested randomly by friends
A2		C2	B5	A5
A3		C3		B4
A4	→ A1	C5		C1
A7	→ A6	C6		C4
B3	→ B2	C7		
B1				

I acknowledge that although this study is looking at the discursive construction of identities among new mothers, the participants were, evidently, selected on non-discursive criteria. Nonetheless, it must be noted that this decision, i.e. selecting participants from various demographic backgrounds and through different sampling methods, was not made with the aim of making generalised claims about the data, but simply to capture some different voices of Malaysian new mothers. This sampling approach is not in contradiction to the social constructionist and discursive paradigm that this research is taking as it still allows exploration of the participants' many ways of discursively constructing and negotiating their various identities. Despite my attempts to select participants as such, I acknowledge the fact that there are some other limitations in my sampling. For example, due to the moderately conservative setting of Malaysia (Jerome, 2011; Malek, 2016), all the selected participants in this study are homogenous in terms of their marriage status and sexual orientation: they are all heterosexual female parents who were in a married relationship at the point of the interview and conceived their children after marriage.

3.7 Data collection methods

Data for this research were collected through the two research instruments: individual interviews and Facebook and/or Instagram posts.

3.7.1 Individual Interviews

In-depth qualitative, semi-structured and individual interviews were conducted to obtain the primary data for this study. In general, qualitative research interviews are selected as the primary source of data because they can provide detailed information about, and a deeper understanding of, the interviewees' experiences and opinions about certain topics, facilitate the co-construction of meanings, and promote a reflexive dimension to research (Mann, 2016), which are all salient elements in identity construction processes. Despite the common assumptions that research

interviews are a relatively inauthentic source of qualitative data since the interactants are aware of their responses and each other's roles, a few studies have found that they represent a rich site for identity work whereby both the interviewer and the interviewee co-construct their identities, (Mann, 2010; Yates, 2013). Semi-structured interviews were specifically used to allow "enough framework to focus the topics of conversation, whilst still giving participants the opportunity to describe their lives in their own words" (Weaver & Ussher, 1997, p. 53). Preparing and writing up the semi-structured interviews was, however, not a straightforward process. The questions and prompts of the interviews were developed based on the review of related literature on motherhood and identity, and revisions were made after the pilot study. Also, it must be noted that the different types of relationships between the interviewer and participants, and the ensuing questions asked in the research interviews, may affect their responses, thus inadvertently influencing the data categories that were later considered inductive in the analysis.

Individual semi-structured interviewing techniques are used in related research fields (Choi et al., 2005; Duberley & Carrigan, 2012; Laney et al., 2014; Liamputtong et al., 2004; Weaver & Ussher, 1997). The participants were interviewed individually to facilitate more intimate, less intimidating and less judgmental environments, with the view to allowing more openness in sharing their true experiences and beliefs on mothering issues (Denscombe, 2014). The study employed conversational and narrative interview techniques which allow maximum flexibility by following participants "down their diverse trails" (Riessman, 2002, p. 696). Indeed, most semi-structured interviews do incorporate conversational elements or exchanges (Mann, 2016). I believe that more insightful data can be obtained from participants in relatively casual and private conversations because such a setting can give them greater voice, and serve as an empowering and less-judgmental platform for them to express their deep-seated personal stories and ideas about motherhood (Austin & Carpenter, 2008; Denscombe, 2014; Schnurr et al., 2016).

In terms of the interview setting, the venues in which the interviews were conducted were decided by the participants so that they might be more comfortable and open to sharing their honest opinions, beliefs and experiences. Most of the interviews were conducted casually in the participants' homes or at a restaurant or cafeteria of the participants' choice. For most of them, the interviews were conducted without the

presence of other adults who were known to the participants. Since I allowed the participants to choose the setting, a few participants like Hana and Qisya elected to have the interviews in public restaurants and did have their husbands sitting next to them during some parts of the interviews, as they commuted together from home and had meals at the venue. Other participants like Vera and Nadia had their husbands in the vicinity of the research setting because the interviews were conducted in their own homes, but their spouses were not within ear-shot of the conversation. In terms of language, I allowed the participants to choose the language that they preferred to use during the interview, meaning that most interviews were multilingual (Malay and English) and required translation after transcription.

The participants were only interviewed once as this study regards social media data as the *diachronic* data source from which some evidence of change over time can be obtained. The following table shows the chronological order of the interviews conducted between 18th July 2016 and 4th September 2016, along with the locations (states) in which the interviews took place:

Table 3.3 Interviews conducted between July 2016 and September 2016

No	Label	Pseudonym	Date	Time
JOHOR				
1.	B1	Mira (M)	18/07/16	05.00PM
PERAK				
2.	B2	Ain (A)	24/07/16	11.00AM
KEDAH				
3.	A1	Jasmin (J)	26/07/16	12.00PM
KUALA LUMPUR/SELANGOR				
4.	B3	Sarah (S)	31/07/16	09.00AM
5.	B4	Nadia (N)	31/07/16	06.00PM
6.	A2	Lippy Morgan (LM)	01/08/16	12.00PM
7.	C1	Intan (I)	01/08/16	05.00PM
8.	B5	Faz (F)	01/08/16	11.30PM
9.	C2	Zara (Z)	02/08/16	10.00AM
10.	C3	Tasha (T)	02/08/16	02.00PM
11.	A3	Kiran (K)	03/08/16	12.00PM
PENANG				
12.	A4	Cathy (C)	18/08/16	03.00PM
KEDAH				
13.	A5	Hana (H)	20/08/16	10.00AM
SELANGOR				
14.	C4	Yaya (Y)	01/09/16	12.00PM
KOTA KINABALU				
15.	A6	Eva (E)	02/09/16	12.30PM
16.	C5	Dyana (D)	02/09/16	07.00PM
17.	C6	Vera (V)	03/09/16	10.00AM
18.	A7	Bernice (B)	03/09/16	04.00PM
KUALA LUMPUR				
19.	C7	Qisya (Q)	04/09/16	01.00PM

[see Figure 1.1 to locate the respective states in Malaysia]

3.7.2 Facebook and/or Instagram Posts

Multiple data sources can foster credibility in a research project and lead to triangulation of the findings (Riazi, 2016), and more specifically, allow a multi-angle approach that sparks rich insights. For this reason, status updates, pictures, videos and accompanying descriptions related to motherhood which were posted by participants on Facebook and/or Instagram during a retrospective period of six months, were collected and analysed. As mentioned in section 3.6 earlier, the posts were only collected from users who had active Facebook and/or Instagram accounts (not hidden, deactivated or deleted) with at least three motherhood-related posts published on at least one of the platforms across the data collection period. Backdated data needed to be obtained to ensure only naturally occurring data were collected for analysis. It is important to highlight that the use of social media data for this research parallels many other discourse analytic approaches that work with pre-existing naturally-occurring data, not just data that are solicited for the research project (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Indeed, naturally-occurring data are significant in unpacking interactants' identity constructions in a range of settings (Angouri, 2015). Supplementing my interview data with social media posts is justified because quite a number of previous studies also used existing media discourses to fully understand motherhood discourses (Kaufmann & Buckner, 2014; Wall, 2013; Yulindrasari & McGregor, 2011). After all, as expounded in Chapter 2, the Internet is still perceived by many parents as a supplementary form of communication for face-to-face interactions (Plantin & Daneback, 2009; Smyth, 2012). The decision to use social media as a supplementary form of data to support the research interviews also somewhat addresses the concept of the Observer's Paradox – "which is the problem faced by researchers who want to observe how people behave when they are not being observed" (Coates, 1993, p. 5).

Facebook is chosen as one of the social media platforms as it is the most powerful SNS (Dijck, 2013) and it has more than one billion monthly active users (Kalampokis, Tambouris & Tarabanis, 2013). Facebook is also the most used SNS platform in Malaysia ("Kantar TNS", 2016). In addition, Facebook is viewed as a mass and unique social phenomenon in itself, constantly transforming to stay relevant (Kaufmann & Burkner, 2014). Besides that, Facebook has flexible rules about membership, information disclosure and interaction (Ahn, 2011), which is beneficial for an investigation of users' identities (Hongladarom, 2011; Zhao, Grusmucka & Martina,

2008). Facebook is also found to be the most appealing SNS for mothers as they represent 65% of Facebook's female users in the United States (Engel, 2010), and more specifically, 78% of 'social media mothers' use Facebook the most (DeCesare, 2016). A study revealed that Facebook is the preferred SNS for mothers with children below the age of five (Strange, 2013). Furthermore, more than 25 million Facebook groups were created specifically to target mothers (Kaufmann & Buckner, 2014).

Instagram posts are also used as a source of data because with more than 500 million active users, it is currently the second most popular SNS platform behind Facebook (DeMers, 2017). In the context of Malaysia, Malaysians are found to be the most active Instagram users in the Asia Pacific region ("Survey: Malaysians the", 2016). For mothers, it is the third most popular SNS after Facebook and Pinterest (DeCesare, 2016). Instagram is visual and simple to use, attracts younger users, facilitates quick image editing and has reasonably tight personal networks (DeMers, 2017). Its simple, personalised and close-knit nature has attracted many users (DeMers, 2017), including mothers, to use it along with (or instead of) Facebook.

I would like to further clarify the types of social media posts that are included and excluded from the current study. Only motherhood-related posts published by the participants themselves were collected for analysis. The posts could include personal posts that were originally and fully written by the participants as well as shared posts, i.e. posts that contain articles, captions or audio-visuals originally posted by other users, but re-posted by the participants on their social media pages (with or without their own additional caption). This means that any other posts, in the form of public messages directed to the participants or 'tagged' posts (external posts in which the participants' user names are typed in to alert them to something), that were posted by other users were not collected for analysis, even if they appeared on the participants' social media pages and did relate to motherhood. Also, the social media pages of my participants were all semi-public in the sense that only approved 'friends' and followers of the participants could view and communicate directly with the participants. Semi-public posts were chosen because, based on my general observations, mothers tend to post more detailed descriptions of their motherhood experiences and beliefs within a more private and selected social network. This decision was also made to ensure uniformity in terms of the nature of the social media

pages of all the participants, thus allowing more valid interpretations to be made about the different ways the participants construct their identities on the selected digital platforms.

Furthermore, I should note that because of the ample amount of social media data collected for this research, it was deemed unnecessary to include and analyse the comments section of both the collected Facebook and Instagram data (e.g. likes, written and audio-visual comments). After all, this research aims to investigate the participants' own processes of identity construction, and the inclusion and analysis of other users' responses might have deviated from the focus of the study. The decision to exclude the comments was also made after considering certain ethical concerns, such as: the difficulty of getting consent from all the people who responded to certain posts; and the impossibility of getting consent from many of them in any case as they were not the selected participants of this research. Also, the time and space limitations of this PhD thesis did not allow for the analysis of too many types of data. Other users' responses, therefore, were either deleted or not recorded in the first place. The information of those who responded to the participants' posts was anonymised. Nevertheless, I recognise the possibly great impact of other people's responses to social media posts, and thus, any comments that are seen to be significantly influencing the ways the participants construct or 'edit' certain posts are generally reported in the analysis.

The following are some samples of collected Facebook and Instagram posts with their distinctive basic features:

(a) Samples of Facebook posts:

(i) A sample of a Facebook post with a personal caption and uploaded images.

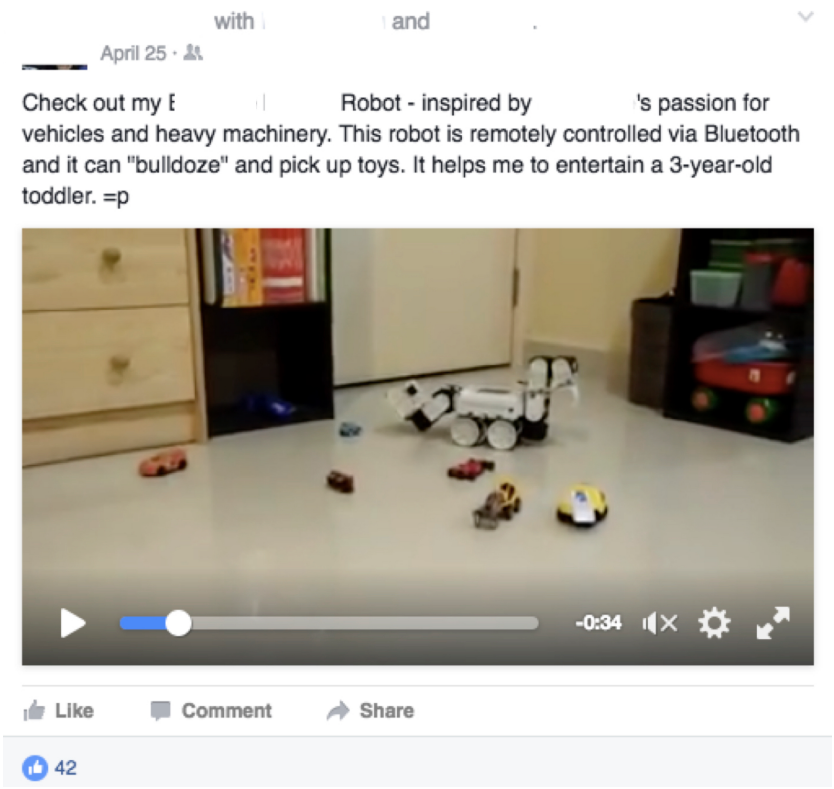
Jasmin (32, WM, West Malaysia, West Malaysia, Malay, Muslim, 2)

(ii) A sample of a Facebook post that shared a public post from another Facebook user without any personal caption.

Qisya (29, SAHM, West Malaysia, West Malaysia, Malay, Muslim, 1)

(iii) A sample of a Facebook post that contains motion visuals (e.g. a video or gif, and was included in coding but excluded from further discourse analysis).

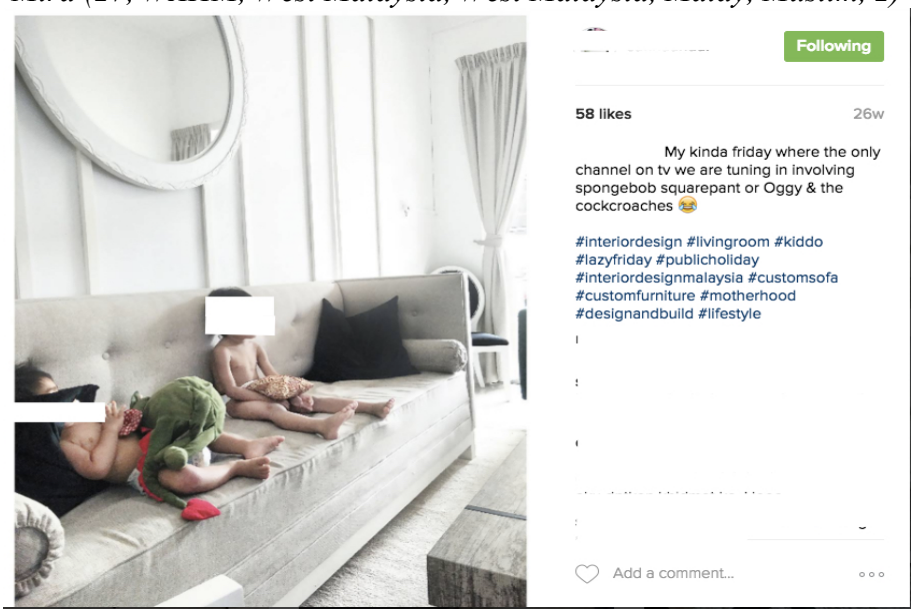
Cathy (32, WM, East Malaysia, West Malaysia, Chinese, Christian, 1)



(b) Samples of Instagram posts:

(i) A sample of an Instagram post with a short caption.

Mira (27, WAHM, West Malaysia, West Malaysia, Malay, Muslim, 2)

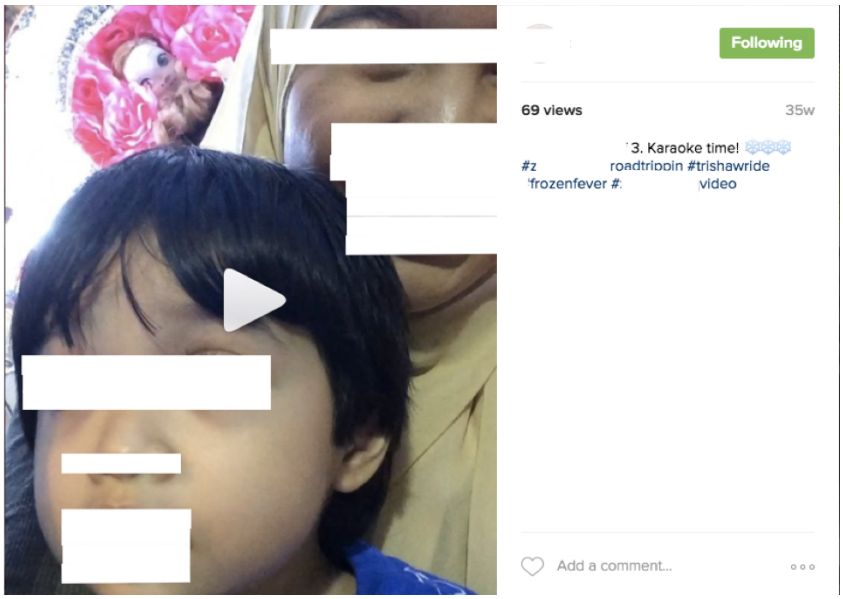


(ii) A sample of an Instagram post with a long caption (caption goes beyond one screenshot view).

Sarah (32, WAHM, West Malaysia, West Malaysia, Malay, Muslim, 2)

(iii) A sample of an Instagram post that contains motion visuals (e.g. a videos or gif, and was included in coding but excluded from further discourse analysis).

Yaya (29, SAHM, West Malaysia, West Malaysia, Malay, Muslim, 2)



The following Table 3.4 summarises the number and types of all social media posts which have been coded (but not necessarily considered for detailed discourse analysis).

Table 3.4 A summary of participants' motherhood-related social media posts (1st March 2016 - 31st August 2016).

Label	FACEBOOK							INSTAGRAM				
	Personal post (audio-visual file/s without caption)	*Personal post (caption with image/s)*	*Personal post (caption with video/s)*	*Personal post (caption without other file/s)*	*Shared posts/ links/ audio-visual (without caption)*	*Shared posts/ links/ audio-visual (with caption)*	**Total**	*No caption*	*Short caption*	*Long caption*	Video	**Total**
WM												
A1	1	6	0	3	6	10	**26**	1	3	0	0	**4**
A2	0	85	4	13	8	34	**144**	PERMISSION NOT GIVEN				
A3	0	1	0	1	2	1	**5**	N/A				
A4	0	6	3	3	9	15	**36**	N/A				
A5	0	12	1	3	3	3	**22**	0	11	0	2	**13**
A6	4	124	20	7	11	20	**186**	46	248	0	56	**350**
A7	3	175	10	13	5	15	**221**	1	128	1	9	**139**
Total	**8**	**409**	**38**	**43**	**44**	**98**	**(640)**	**48**	**390**	**1**	**67**	**(506)**
WAHM												
B1	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**	0	4	0	0	**4**
B2	0	6	0	0	3	14	**23**	0	40	0	12	**52**
B3	0	7	0	0	14	8	**29**	0	31	3	0	**34**
B4	2	48	1	53	2	10	**116**	0	51	4	4	**59**
B5	1	32	0	3	17	33	**86**	0	19	2	0	**21**
Total	**3**	**93**	**1**	**56**	**36**	**65**	**(254)**	**0**	**145**	**9**	**16**	**(170)**
SAHM												
C1	0	2	3	3	4	8	**20**	0	72	0	15	**87**
C2	3	36	0	3	5	14	**61**	0	76	2	2	**80**
C3	12	92	15	2	3	12	**136**	0	157	0	23	**180**
C4	N/A							0	86	2	6	**94**
C5	2	15	0	1	3	1	**22**	0	45	5	14	**64**
C6	0	1	0	1	1	2	**5**	N/A				
C7	0	5	4	2	6	49	**66**	0	6	0	4	**10**
Total	**17**	**151**	**22**	**12**	**22**	**86**	**(310)**	**0**	**442**	**9**	**64**	**(551)**
TOTAL	**28**	**653**	**61**	**111**	**102**	**249**	***1204***	**48**	**977**	**19**	**147**	***1191***
TOTAL												**2395**

To briefly comment on the information in Table 3.4, there are 2395 various types of motherhood-related posts that were collected from the participants' Facebook and Instagram personal accounts within the six-month data collection period. There is an insignificant difference between the number of posts collected from Facebook and Instagram. Nonetheless, it is noted that there are significantly more Facebook posts collected from the WMs compared to the other two groups, and most Instagram posts are collected from the SAHM participants. No big claims can be made about the number of posts published on the two platforms because the number of Facebook and Instagram accounts through which the social media posts were sourced is not the same (based on accounts available and consent given). For the same reason, too, no valid statements can be made about the differences in the amount of posts published by participants according to their different career-role categories. However, it can be observed that most Facebook posts collected were personal posts with caption and images. All Instagram posts necessarily included images, but it can be said that most of the images were accompanied by short captions.

3.8 Data analysis processes

Overall, this research involves two stages of analysis: first a thematic qualitative analysis, and second a detailed discourse analysis, guided by the theoretical and analytical framework outlined in section 3.2. The second stage aims to fulfil the primary purpose of discourse analysis, which is to "provide a deeper understanding and appreciation of texts and how they become meaningful to their users" (Paltridge, 2012, p. 3). Before analysing the data thematically during the coding process, the data were first transcribed, translated and anonymised, as elucidated in the following sub-section.

3.8.1 Transcribing, Translating and Anonymising Processes

For the Facebook and Instagram data, they did not require transcription because they were already documented online. The interview data, on the other hand, were transcribed verbatim by myself and a few other paid transcribers. Detailed transcription conventions such as the one proposed by Jefferson (2004) were deemed unnecessary for the interview data in this study. This is because minute details relating

to pauses and overlaps were not considered important in analysing the processes of identity construction in this research context. As such, transcription process did not show all paralinguistic details. Certain easily noticeable and salient paralinguistic features, like laughter, were indicated in brackets in the transcription, and different intonations expressed by the participants are reported in the analysis, if relevant. A record of the length of the interviews, along with all transcribers and the duration of transcription are as follows:

Table 3.5 Interview transcription schedule

No	Label	Pseudonym	Length	Transcribers	Start date	End date
WM						
1.	A1	Jasmin (J)	02:43:08	Transcriber 2	01/04/17	27/08/17
2.	A2	L.Morgan (LM)	00:56:01	The researcher	20/08/16	31/08/16
3.	A3	Kiran (K)	01:49:01	Transcriber 5	27/09/16	09/10/16
4.	A4	Cathy (C)	02:08:38	Transcriber 1	29/05/17	16/06/17
5.	A5	Hana (H)	01:19:51	Transcriber 1	19/06/17	12/07/17
6.	A6	Eva (E)	02:09:03	Transcriber 1	19/05/17	29/05/17
7.	A7	Bernice (B)	01:35:16	Transcriber 1	16/11/16	22/11/16
WAHM						
1.	B1	Mira (M)	01:03:30	The researcher	01/04/17	06/04/17
2.	B2	Ain (A)	02:17:47	Transcriber 4 & the researcher	09/08/16	12/11/16
3.	B3	Sarah (S)	02:32:31	Transcriber 2	19/11/16	29/11/16
4.	B4	Nadia (N)	01:39:43	Transcriber 2	18/01/17	22/02/17
5.	B5	Faz (F)	02:03:08	Transcriber 2	02/11/16	17/11/16
SAHM						
1.	C1	Intan (I)	01:13:44	Transcriber 2	27/02/17	30/03/17
2.	C2	Zara (Z)	01:57:54	Transcriber 1, 2, & the researcher	19/11/16	24/11/16
3.	C3	Tasha (T)	02:00:01	The researcher	29/09/16	12/10/16
4.	C4	Yaya (Y)	02:13:12	The researcher	30/07/17	10/08/17
5.	C5	Dyana (D)	01:49:29	Transcriber 3	15/03/17	29/09/17
6.	C6	Vera (V)	01:12:37	Transcriber 3	02/11/16	15/11/16
7.	C7	Qisya (Q)	01:19:03	Transcriber 1	12/07/17	20/07/17

The next phase involved translating selected parts of the interviews and Facebook and/or Instagram posts that were produced in the Malay language. Additionally for Facebook and/or Instagram data, anonymisation processes involved concealing all participants' personal details such as their names, faces as well as the details of the people involved in the conversations. This was undertaken using PDF editing tools.

3.8.2 Interpreting Data Processes

The two interrelated phases of analysis of this study, ((i) thematic coding and (ii) discourse analysis), reflect the ways data are analysed in other studies on motherhood discourses (Liamputtong et al., 2004; Wall, 2013; Weaver & Ussher, 1997; Yulindrasari & McGregor, 2011). The more detailed stages involved in the processes of interpreting the collected data are summarised in the following two figures:

(i) Analysis Phase I: Thematic analysis – Identifying themes and discourses, and selecting data

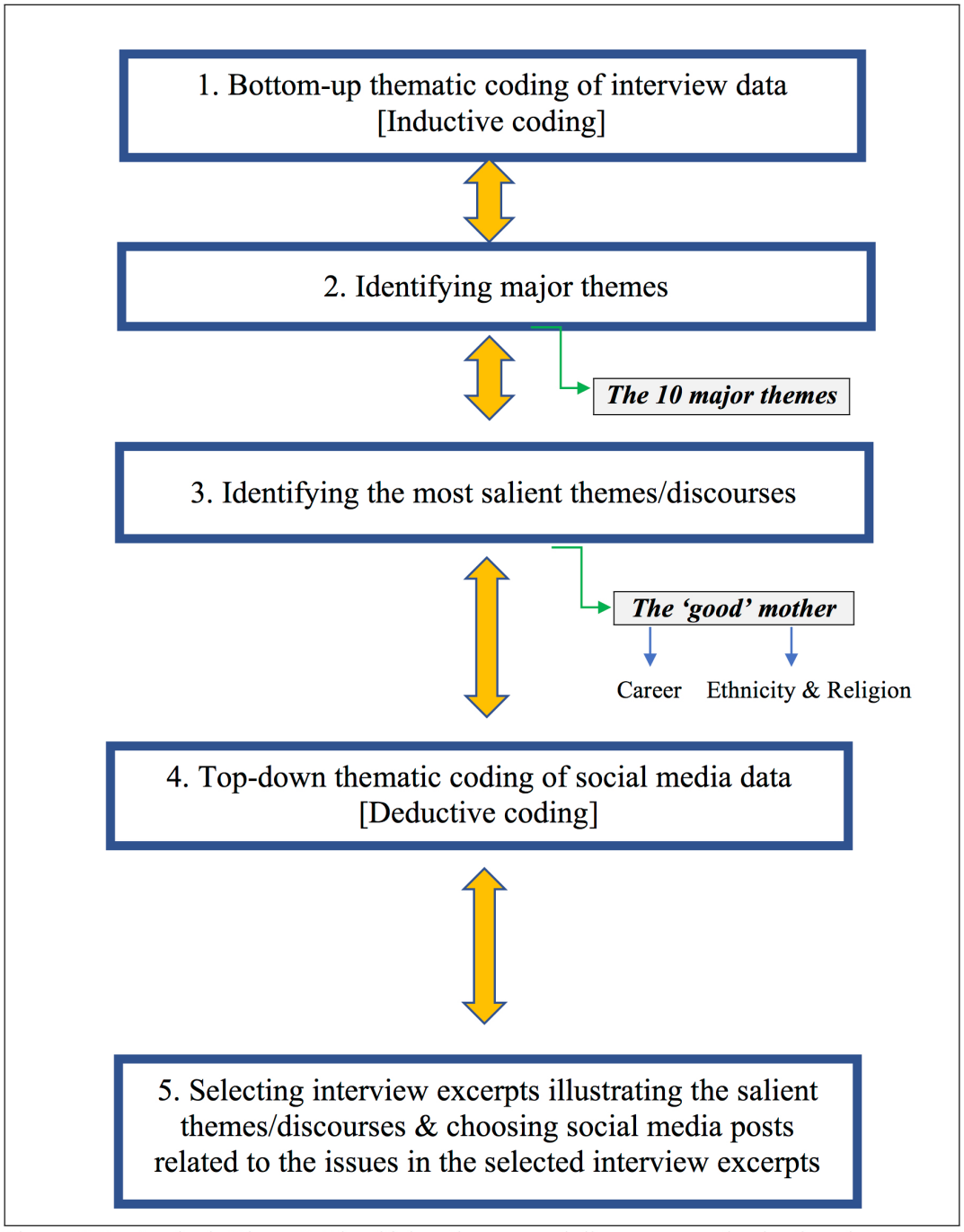


Figure 3.2 Analysis Phase I: Identifying themes and discourses, and selecting data

The first stage involves inductive thematic coding of the interview data using the NVivo software (see Appendix 4 for a sample of the coding method). Next, during and after the processes of coding all collected interview data, I continued to revise the emergent codes to the point that I could see a few major themes under which all other

codes belonged to. Ten major themes emerged and were finalised before more specific decisions regarding data selection and analysis were made (refer to Appendix 4 and Table 4.1). The next stage of the analysis involved identifying the most salient themes or discourses across the whole dataset. It was at this stage that I found that the theme of the ‘‘good’ mother’ is the most salient and overarching across the interview data. I, thus, decided that the theme, and what I also regard as discourse, would guide the direction, structure and arguments of the data analysis. During this process, too, I noticed that the themes of ‘relations to career’, ‘ethnicity’ and ‘religion’ were distinctive within the dataset of the Malaysian participants. Again, this finding is reflected in the structure of the ensuing analysis chapters. It must be noted that the codes, themes and discourses were provisionally named and interpreted based on relevant literature, the researcher’s own knowledge and understanding of the data using informed implicature. They are also named as simply as possible so as to assist the reader’s understanding. In the fourth stage of analysis, I started coding all of the social media posts deductively based on the ten major themes that emerged from the coding of the interview data. The final stage involved selecting interview excerpts for each of the analysis chapters and then selecting relevant social media posts that were specifically related to the interview excerpts. More detailed descriptions of these stages for each of type of data will be provided in the forthcoming sub-sections. The second phase of interpreting the data was the detailed discourse analysis of a few selected excerpts and is summarised in the following sub-section:

(ii) Analysis Phase II: Detailed discourse analysis based on identified themes and discourses

The following diagram depicts how the *positionality*, *indexicality* and *relationalilty* principles by Bucholtz and Hall (2005), Baxter’s (2007) *denotative-connotative* levels of analysis and *powerfulness-powerlessness* principle, and Schippers’ (2007) *local*, *regional* and *global* levels of analysing hegemonic femininities work together to help me illustrate the complexities of the participants’ construction of identities in the data collected.

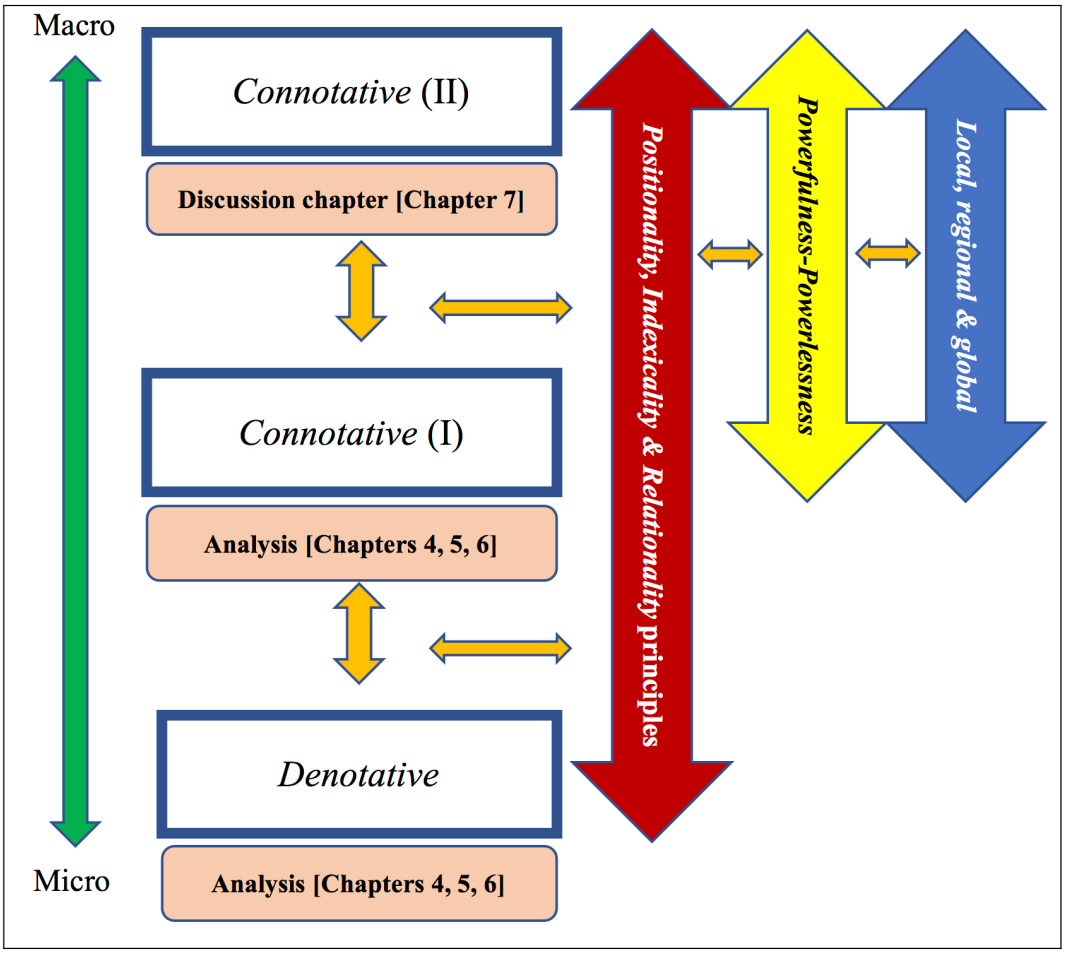


Figure 3.3 Analytical framework and concepts used in the respective chapters

Figure 3.3 will be briefly described with regards to the processes involved in the second phase of data analysis. In essence, discourse analysis of the selected interview and social media data first involves analysis at the *denotative* level of textual analysis (Baxter, 2007). At this detailed *denotative* level, the three selected principles of sociocultural linguistic principles (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) may also be relevant, especially the *indexicality* principle. The *denotative* approach to analysing the data is employed in all analysis chapters (Chapters 4, 5 & 6). The next level involves the *connotative* interpretation of data which seeks to evaluate and interpret beyond the detailed linguistic analysis. The *denotative* and *connotative* interpretations of the data are undertaken in an alternate sequence in all three analysis chapters to promote better links between the linguistic and broader interpretations, and also better assist the researcher's and readers' understanding of the selected data. The final stage in the *connotative* analysis attempts to synthesise the analysis across the entire analysed data set. This is captured in the discussion chapter. The relations of *powerfulness-*

powerlessness [yellow arrow] (Baxter, 2007) and the *local*, *regional* and *global* levels within the concept of hegemonic femininities [blue arrow] (Schippers, 2007) will be employed conceptually in analysing the data at the *connotative* levels. The two-directional arrows suggest that the process of interpreting the data is non-linear and recursive: i.e. on many occasions, it requires going back and forth between the different levels of analysis. Overall, Figure 3.3 highlights that the data analysis processes incorporate both 'micro' and 'macro' levels of analysis. Moreover, it demonstrates that FPDA's *denotative-connotative* levels of textual analysis and the three sociocultural linguistic principles (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) form the overarching framework of the analysis. Other concepts within the framework are relevant at different points of the analysis, working together to paint a clearer picture of the processes of identity construction among the participants. The following sub-sections will more specifically explain how the different types of dataset are interpreted.

(a) Interpreting interview data

The thematic analysis of the interview data began with a bottom-up approach by coding important parts of the interviews into salient themes. This is quite a common way of analysing motherhood-related discourses based on previous studies (Liamputtong et al., 2004; Wall, 2013). This coding process was done via NVivo software for a more systematic organisation and interpretation of data (see Appendix 4 for a sample), similar to the way Duberley and Carrigan (2012) analysed the data in their study. I initially planned to undertake inductive coding of only fifteen participants, but in the end, I coded all nineteen recorded interviews in order to reach saturation point – after which no further salient themes were generated (Liamputtong et al., 2004). This process went on for about five months, from October 2016 to February 2017, with numerous rounds of revision which included re-organisation, proofreading, removing, adding and merging certain codes until clearer major and sub-themes and salient discourses in relation to identity construction emerged. The revisions were necessary to ensure that none of all the themes were redundant and best represented all the mothers' opinions and beliefs, as well as the richness of the interview data. All of the themes were coded in English, regardless of the language used in the transcription, to ensure more reliable interpretations of data and for practicality. The coding was undertaken as systematically as possible using

alphanumeric codes. These eased my interpretation of the data and the writing process (see Appendix 3). Many of the themes, nevertheless, overlapped with some other themes (see Appendix 4). This is unproblematic and in fact, generally indicates that the new mothers construct various identities alongside others as they shared their motherhood experiences and beliefs in the interviews. With reference to Figure 3.2, interpreting the interview data involved the following stages:

i. Initial inductive coding of interview excerpts.
ii. Identifying different major and salient themes and discourses.
iii. Selecting interview excerpts for further analysis based on the salient themes and discourses.
iv. Linguistic and theoretical analysis of the selected interview excerpts.

In the analysis chapters, the turns of the participants' utterances in the interview excerpts are presented similar to the turns that were initially recorded in the original transcriptions. This decision is made not only to assist my own analysis but also to facilitate the reader's understanding of the location and flow of various utterances from the same participant(s). This method is also useful if any references to the original transcriptions need to be made at any point.

(b) Interpreting social media data

The process of analysing the social media data started with thematically coding all the motherhood-related Facebook and Instagram posts. The process was quite different from coding the interview data as it was done via a top-down approach using the existing ten emerging major themes that were derived from coding the interviews. Deductive coding was employed for the first stage of analysis for practical reasons, considering that there were thousands of relevant posts. Also, this decision is justified by the fact that the social media posts represented a supplementary form of data. For that reason, all the 2395 social media posts were first deductively coded to the ten emerging themes in order to get a general idea of the different types of information related to the social media posts. Different salient aspects of the social media posts such as the captions (what is written in the status update section), the audio-visuals and the content shared from external sources, were taken into account in coding the posts. The following image illustrates a sample of one type of Facebook post (a post

shared by Cathy from a public page called 'First Smile – Baby Journal App'), with all its salient multimodal aspects that have been deductively coded to highlight relevant emergent major themes:

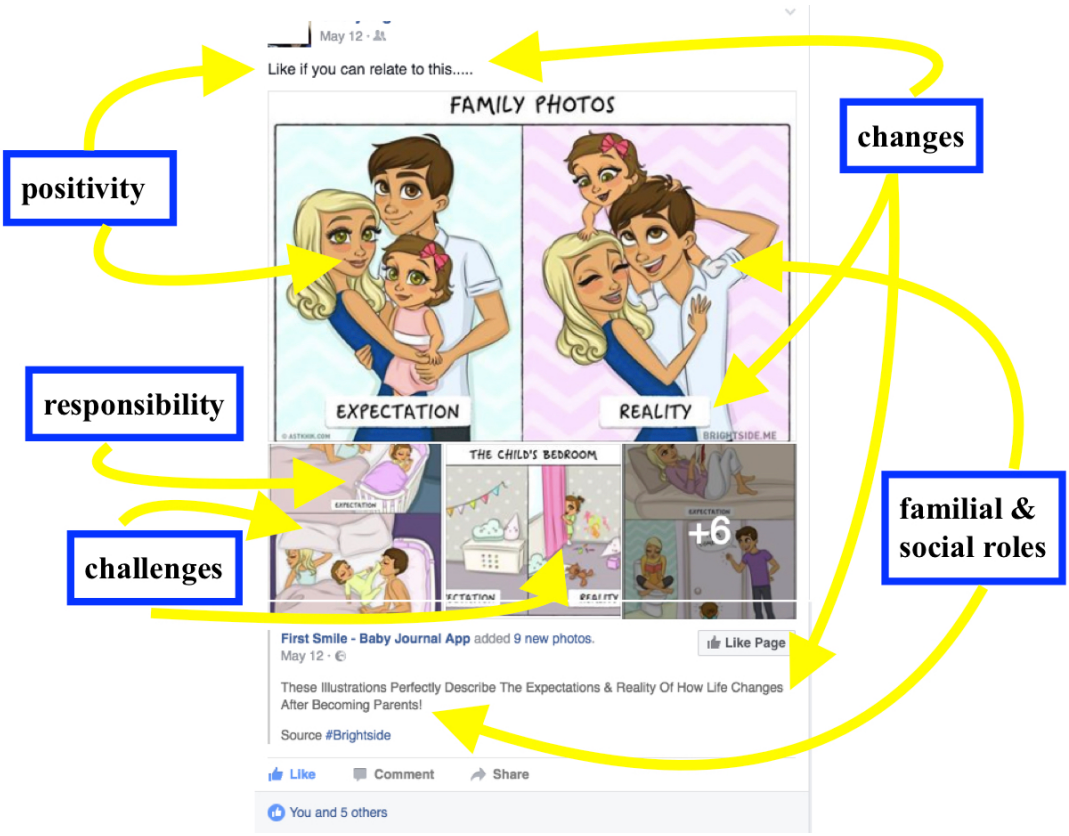


Figure 3.4 A sample of a deductively coded social media post

For practical reasons, however, the deductive coding of all the posts was done in a table grid in a Word document by referring to the unique alphanumerical code given to each post (refer to Appendix 7 & 8). The social media posts were first coded simultaneously on the 'grid table' and on NVivo. The massive amount of social media data, however, led to the crash of my NVivo file and I lost all recently coded data which was not backed up. I then decided, for purposes of data security, to code all the social media posts only using the grid table on Word.

Once all the social media posts were coded, the codes were revisited in order to select the ones that were relevant to the selected interview excerpts (in terms of the motherhood-related issues featured). Some of the criteria for selecting the social media posts included:

a. posts that were deductively coded to the most frequently-coded theme;
b. multiplicity of identities reflected from the multiple number of themes coded to individual posts;
c. posts that showed salient similarities and/or differences between interviews, Facebook and Instagram posts;
d. posts that showed similarities and/or differences between different career role categories of participants in relation to the ‘‘good’ mother’ theme and interview data; and
e. posts that showed similarities and/or differences between personal and shared posts by the participants.

Once relevant social media posts were selected for further analysis in each of the analysis chapters, the posts were anonymised using PDF editing tools. The screenshots of social media posts in JPG format were exported into PDF format for editing purposes. The anonymised posts were later exported back into JPG format and copied and pasted into this Word document. Referring to Figure 3.2, the processes of interpreting the social media data can be summarised through the following stages:

i. Initial deductive coding of all collected social media posts.
ii. Selecting social media posts that related to the selected interview excerpts.
iii. Linguistic and theoretical analysis of the selected social media posts.

3.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described how the research paradigm of this study informs the thesis in its design, theoretical and analytical framework, selection of participants, data collection procedures and data analysis method. Moreover, I have acknowledged my role as the researcher and the relevant ethical issues that have been considered. In the next chapter, I will present a more detailed overview and analysis of the findings of this study.

Chapter 4: General Findings and Analysis (I) – Constructing 'Good' Mother Identities

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the general findings that emerged from the coding of the data, and offer a detailed analysis of selected parts of the data. The emerging themes from the data are first explained, followed by a justification for focusing on the 'good' mother sub-theme across all analysis chapters. From sub-section 4.4 onwards, I analyse the various ways participants orient to the ''good' mother' sub-theme in selected interview excerpts and social media posts. The analysis in this chapter, and also in Chapters 5 and 6, aims to address the following research questions:

1. What identities do the participants construct in interviews and on social media?

2. How are these identities constructed and negotiated in interviews and on social media?

The chapter will conclude with final comments on the data analysed in this chapter.

4.2 Overview of major themes

In this section, I will provide an overview of the major themes by exploring: (i) the main themes that emerged from the interviews; (ii) deductively coded social media posts; and (iii) the relationships between the emerging themes.

4.2.1 Emergent major themes from inductive coding of the interviews

Based on several rounds of coding the interview data, the following ten major themes were identified. These themes are sequenced based on their frequency (generated by the NVivo software):

Table 4.1 Ten major themes emerging from the interview data

No.	Major themes	Number of times coded	Number of participants coded
1.	*Judgments and views*	1787	19
2.	*Changes*	1754	19
3.	*Challenges*	1640	19
4.	*Familial and societal roles*	1597	19
5.	*Positivity*	1445	19
6.	*Technology and social media*	1160	19
7.	*Relations to career*	791	19
8.	*Responsibility*	643	19
9.	*Ethnicity and culture*	174	18
10.	*Spirituality*	141	14
Total		11,132	N/A

[See Appendix 3 for more complete quantitative information about the themes and their respective sub-themes. See Appendix 6 for their operationalised definitions].

Based on Table 4, it is apparent that 'judgments and views' is the most frequently coded major theme, within which the sub-theme of the ''good' mother' is located. The theme of 'judgments and views' is followed closely by the theme of 'changes', while 'spirituality' is the least coded across the data. All the sub-themes that emanate from the data so far belong to at least one of these ten major themes. The first eight themes are coded to all nineteen participants whilst 'ethnicity and culture' is coded to eighteen participants and 'spirituality' is coded to only fourteen mothers. The reasons why the relatively less frequently-coded themes of 'relations to career', 'ethnicity and culture' and 'spirituality' are, nonetheless, featured in the forthcoming Chapters 5 and 6 will be explicated in these respective chapters.

4.2.2 Deductively Coded Social Media Posts

The following Table 4.2 provides information about the themes identified through the coding process of all 2395 motherhood-related social media. The themes are listed in order of frequency:

Table 4.2 Social media posts deductively coded to the ten major themes

No.	Major themes	Number of times coded on Facebook	Number of times coded on Instagram	Total
1.	*Positivity*	1145	1191	**2336**
2.	*Responsibility*	836	1032	**1868**
3.	*Familial and societal roles*	601	463	**1064**
4.	*Challenges*	393	217	**610**
5.	*Changes*	271	226	**497**
6.	*Spirituality*	242	136	**378**
7.	*Relations to career*	210	65	**275**
8.	*Ethnicity and culture*	85	103	**188**
9.	*Technology and social media*	40	37	**77**
10.	*Judgments and views*	49	10	**59**
Total		3872	3480	7352

[See Appendix 7 & 8 to see deductively-coded social media posts on a 'table grid'].

As shown in Table 4.2, the frequency of the themes deductively coded in the social media posts is rather different from the findings of the inductively coded interview data. The majority of the social media posts are coded to the theme of 'positivity' whilst the least coded theme is 'judgments and views'. This finding is in stark contrast to the themes coded in the interviews. This may be because 'judgments and views' is more likely to be implicitly referenced within 'positive' social media posts, unlike interviews in which the women's responses about 'judgments and views' may have been triggered by the prompts in the prepared interview guide. Although more Facebook posts were collected for this study, there are more Instagram posts coded to the 'positivity' theme. This is possibly because Instagram posts are more personal, must be in the form of visuals, and it is much harder on Instagram to share articles or audio-visuals from external sources (that may feature more contentious issues of motherhood).

The posts were collected from March 1, 2016 to August 31, 2016, and Eid was celebrated in June that year. This may explain the frequency of the themes of 'familial and societal roles' and 'spirituality' if participants posted photos of them with family members and friends during the celebration on social media. This highlights that sociocultural aspects need to be taken into account before interpreting the codes. Another salient observation that warrants a brief explanation is how 'technology and social media' is not frequently coded in the social media data. To make the coding more meaningful, I decided to only code the social media posts to this theme if they

made specific reference to the use of technology and social media. This decision was made to ensure more insightful claims could be made about the salient roles of media and technology.

4.2.3 Visual relationships across all the major themes

With reference to Table 4.1, the ten emerging themes from the interview with links between them, are depicted as follows:

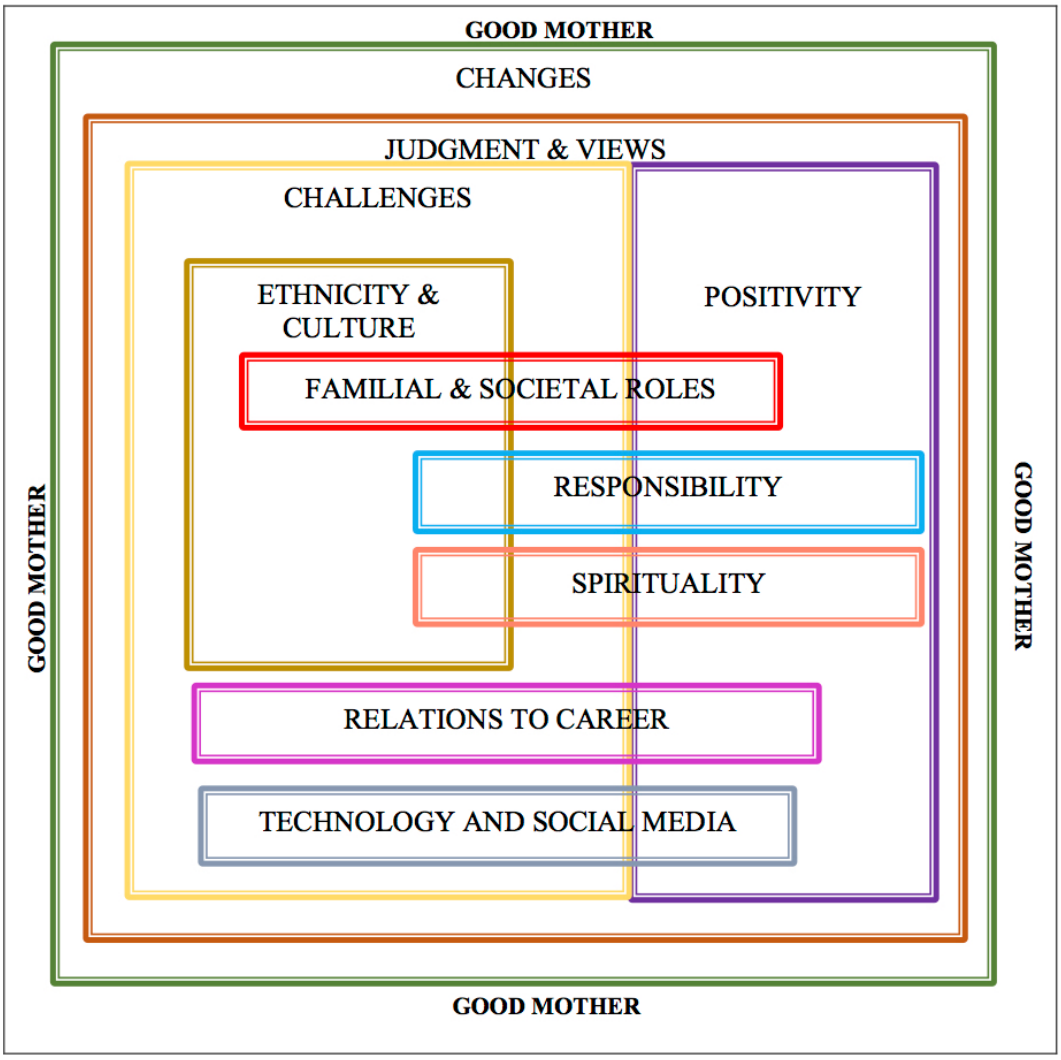


Figure 4.1: The relationships between the ten major themes

Referring to Figure 4.1, I view the issue of identity construction among new mothers as being triggered by the element of change. I thus place 'change' (green frame) as the outermost frame which encapsulates all other nine major themes. After 'judgment and views', the next salient major theme is 'challenges', in which most other remaining

major themes are included, except 'positivity' which only touches its border, signifying that a few participants perceived their mothering challenges positively. Most other remaining themes are found to intersect with both the 'challenges' and 'positivity' themes. I include the ''good' mother' sub-theme on each side of Figure 4.1 to emphasise the prominence of this sub-theme. To reiterate, the clear-cut depictions of the relationships between the themes are for display only and do not capture the actual complexities of the themes and their relationships to one another.

4.3 Rationale for focusing on the ''good' mother' sub-theme

Based on the coded data, there are various discourses through which the nineteen new Malaysian mothers construct their identities in their respective interviews and social media posts. I have demonstrated that the superordinate theme of the ''good' mother' frames all other themes in this study, and that is one justification for selecting it as the focus in all analysis chapters. In addition, this superordinate theme signifies the 'benchmark' by which many new mothers evaluate themselves. It was not my original intention to only focus on the ''good' mother' theme in the data analysis. The decision was triggered upon completion of the first stage of the coding process, at which point the participants were found to be orienting themselves to the ''good' mother' issue naturally, even without explicit prompting. Their responses to the ''good' mother', moreover, can be overt and implicit, vary and interplay with many other important themes that are salient in identity construction. The decision to focus on the 'good' mother discourse is reinforced by the deductive coding of all motherhood-related social media posts and further detailed analysis of selected posts, as these processes reveal numerous instances in which identities are constructed in relation to the evaluative aspect of being a mother. Thus, guided by the research questions stipulated earlier, I will analyse selected excerpts in the forthcoming analysis with specific reference to the ''good' mother' sub-theme.

The following two tables show the sub-themes that are related to the ''good' mother' definition (as expressed by participants) under the major theme of 'judgment and views'. Table 4.3 specifically shows the frequencies of the themes identified in the coding process (in order of frequency) and snippets (short extracts of participants' utterances from longer threads of interview data) for each of the relevant sub-themes.

Since these snippets are provided mainly for exposition (not necessarily selected for detailed analysis), they are all presented in English, even if they were originally expressed in the Malay language.

Table 4.3: Coding information and snippets from interviews for the sub-themes related to the ‘‘good’ mother’ definition through the theme of ‘judgment and views’

Sub-themes	**Number of times coded**	**Number of participant coded**	**Snippets from Interviews Coded to the Sub-themes** (fully translated version)
F. Judgment and views	1787	19	*“Sometimes, yes absolutely. And sometimes, like my mum, might not mean to hurt me…but it does, because when you say things like that it makes me feel like, you…I like, I’m not doing enough. For example like, during Chinese New Year when I went back because she just, she was sick, before Chinese New Year so she lost a lot of weight. Oh my God…like for the first two days all she talked about was how skinny my baby is and all…And it makes me feel bad, like I’m not taking care…”* (*Vera*, turn 194).
f01. 'Good' mother (definition)	451	19	*“…A good mother is the one who is trying to be the best, I mean the best from her own definition of best.”* (*Ain*, turn 803).
f01(k). prioritising child(ren)'s best interest	114	19	*“Always be there for (the) child maybe. If the child is ill, take care of him or her. And then, er try to fulfil what he or she wants but not on ridiculous things lah.”* (*Mira*, turn 214).
f01(a). trying to be a ‘good’ mother	102	17	*“To be a good mother. Just don’t look just think just try to be a good mother all the time and you will only know the results in 20 years. It’s just like taking an exam, right?”* (*L.Morgan*, turn 522).
f01(n). spending time with child(ren)	48	11	*“If this priority is spending time with urmm having that emotional connection with your child then you have to make the conscious decision to put away your your gadgets.”* (*Zara,* turn 711).
f01(b). portraying oneself as not a 'good' mother	47	11	*“I think subconsciously, I try to portray that I’m not a good mum.”* (*Bernice*, turn 1157).
f01(j). attending to child(ren)'s needs	21	7	*“So as long as the common ground is you are there for them and you are meeting their needs, whatever their needs are, I think it’s just good enough for being a good mum.”* (*Kiran*, turn 316).
f01(r). being patient	19	4	*“mmm I think a good mother is like, one she is patient lah.”* (*Dyana*, turn 456).

f01(w). productivity	12	4	*"I think like I become an okay mother when I become a productive mother…like in one day there are always activities (I organise) for my children."* (*Intan*, turn 701).
f01(t). not too much restriction	11	1	*"A mother shouldn't be very protective, like because as my exp- my experience as a teacher in school, I can see lots of uh students kids nowadays, they are not independent."* (*Eva*, turn 618).
f01(e). having happy child(ren)	9	4	*"Like if he's smiling he's the whole day that, I know I did a good job."* (*Tasha*, turn 994).
f01(q). teaching child(ren) skills	9	5	*"So I try to to Dila (the child). Aaa for clothes Dila will fold her own clothes…. Meaning when they are still young, we must teach them give them responsibility lah right."* (*Jasmin*, turn 2145).
f01(h). supportiveness	7	3	*"... We we have to support the child all the time, spiritually, physically all the time all."* (*Tasha*, turn 972).
f01(m). children management skills	7	3	*"Some people (coughs) can control their kids well."* (*Faz*, turn 2316).
f01(l). less judgment	6	3	*"Aa em trying to be a good mother also not to pass judging on people."* (*Sarah*, turn 3243).
f01(o). sincerity	6	1	*"I mean if you're sincere as a mother, and of of course err the roles are intertwined with the roles of a a being wife as well. If you were sincere, you will prioritise your family, and by prioritizing it means that using the best."* (*Zara*, turn 515).
f01(p). providing material comfort to child(ren)	6	5	*"I think like sometimes I, I still need money to, like I said lah to be a good mother I still need a bit of money to, to go with my kids. But I'd also like sometimes to bring my kid you know to extra curricular (activities)."* (*Sarah*, turn 3277).
f01(u). cooking	5	3	*"Okay for example, urm traditionally I what I understand or what I see (about societal idea of a 'good' mother), traditionally, an a Malay mom, they'll be like, a mom cooks."* (*Yaya*, turn 1084).
f01(c). inexistence of 'good mother' definition	4	2	*"Personally I feel the definition of a good mother doesn't exist."* (*Vera*, turn 182).
f01(d). listening	4	3	*"I think a good mother is a mother who listens to the children."* (*Tasha*, turn 958).

f01(f). protectiveness	4	3	*"So if you understand you're aware of your responsibility to protect your son…. to (unintelligible words) your child, to grow your child in the best way, to put him first in your life priorities, if you are aware, then I think you are a good mother."* (*L.Morgan*, turn 480).
f01(g). responsibility	4	2	*"I think a good mother is someone who understands that the extent of her responsibility in protecting, in growing and ensuring the best interest of your child."* (*L.Morgan*, turn 474).
f01(s). lovingness	3	2	*"For a good mom I think, how aa, give attention to the child, give sufficient love lah."* (*Hana*, turn 356).
f01(i). spirituality	2	1	*"Yeah. You need to be spiritual."* (*Tasha*, turn 1830).
f01(v). discipline	1	1	*"So I prefer discipline, aa. Because I was also raised up that way."* (*Qisya*, turn 1250).

As is evident in Table 4.3, I tried to be as specific as possible in the coding labels as this helps assist the process of data selection. The social media posts that are deductively coded to 'judgments and views', on the other hand, are different in nature because there are no prompts compelling them to define or share stories related to the idea of a 'good' mother. The coded posts generally revolve around implicit portrayals of the self or others as the 'good'/'bad' mother, such as follows:

Table 4.4: Coding information and snippets from social media posts that are coded to 'judgment and views' and relate to the ''good' mother'

Facebook/ Instagram	**Number of times coded**	**Snippets from the captions of social media posts**
Facebook	49	*"What is sleep? Sleep doest exist anymore and life is a blur of diapers, flashing my boobs to everyone and crying (both from me and tiny vagina spawn). God forgive me for ever doubting the words of parents of young children when they told me to sleep while I can, as I laughed and threw chips at their face and stayed up for another 8 hours of overnight marathon dvd watching #baby******"* [accompanied by a blurry image of a crib]. (Bernice, FB_A7_26)
Instagram	10	*"***** loves his buttahhhh ciken*  *#myanaklovesayam *ayamownsmysoul #ofcoslaididntletmyanakmakanlikethatwithoutmashingeverything #ofcoslairemovedthecurryleavestoo #unsaltedbutter*  *#foodporn"*

		[accompanied by an image of a bowl of butter chicken she cooks for her son]. Translation: anak=child, ayam=chicken, ofcos=of course, makan=eat. (Tasha, IG_C3_12)
Total	**59**	-

The following table shows examples of the ways in which participants express their own ‘‘good’ mother’ experiences and opinions through the major theme of ‘positivity’.

Table 4.5: Coding information and snippets from interviews for the sub-themes related to the ‘‘good’ mother’ through the theme of ‘positivity’

Sub-themes	Number of times coded	Number of participa-nts coded	Snippets from Interviews Coded to the Sub-themes
A. Positivity	1445	19	*“So I think like you have to think for positive only la all the time”* (*Tasha*, turn 862).
a02. Doing the ‘right’ thing as a mother	527	19	*“I pride myself on how people talk to me and say he looks very healthy lah….He looks very good, he looks very healthy like his skin is nice, he’s active, he’s blabbering all the way….So like that’s that’s one thing la, I would say I’m doing I’m doing alright there la I suppose ya”* (*Bernice*, turn 548).

As shown in Table 4.5, all nineteen participants state experiences and opinions related to the concept of the ‘‘good’ mother’. It is inevitable that these mothers talk about the aspects of a ‘good’ mother given that it is one of the most common discourses among mothers. Similarly, such a portrayal of self as a ‘‘good’ mother’ is also seen in the deductively coded social media posts:

Table 4.6: Coding information and snippets from social media posts that are coded to ‘positivity’ and relate to the ‘‘good’ mother’

Facebook/ Instagram	Number of times coded	Snippets from the captions of social media posts
Facebook	*1145*	*“Motherhood dare?? I was nominated by ***, to post a picture that makes me feel proud to be a mother (only one picture). I'm going to tag some women that i think are fabulous mothers. If i marked you as one of the awesome moms, copy the text and paste it into your wall with a picture and tag more mothers! Actually think i look 10kgs heavier in this pic but well yeah dats how it is wif my heavy necklace & and bouncing toddler, xleh nk pose btul2*

		[cannot pose for the picture properly]. Selekeh [messy] ugly and proud haha" [accompanied by her own picture with her two sons. 'heavy necklace' refers to one of her sons who is hugging her on her back]. (Dyana, FB_C5_22)
Instagram	*1191*	*""The most precious jewels you'll ever have around your neck are the arms of your children". #********* #******* #kidswear #eUsahawan [eEntrepreneur] #****agent"* [accompanied by an image of the advertisement for her online business which features her daughter as the model]. (Faz, IG_B5_14)
Total	**2336**	**-**

In general, when discursively constructing and negotiating their identities, the nineteen participants often orient to the ''good' mother' in various ways. One of the predominant aspects of identity construction among the participants in this study involves their challenges in negotiating their ideal ''good' mother' concept and reported mothering practices. The challenges are reflected in their varied definitions of a ''good' mother' and the inevitable question of whether they fit into their own criteria.

The arguments in the remaining analysis of this chapter will focus on more general identity construction processes that relate to 'good' motherhood, while Chapters 5 and 6 consider those processes that are more specific and complex with more intersecting discourses.

4.4 Analysis (I) – Constructing various 'good' mother identities

In this section, I will begin analysing in detail the various ways participants orient to the 'good' mother sub-theme and how they construct different versions of 'good' motherhood. As mentioned earlier, the analysis of data in Chapter 4 aims to address the two main research questions (RQ 1 & RQ 2) at a more general level. I will examine the construction of identities by considering how the participants *position* themselves as conforming to, challenging, and/or ambivalently responding to the dominant discourses of ''good' motherhood'. The following sub-sections address each of these three positions. These separate sub-sections do not seek to simplify identities but instead help capture and unpack the nuances of the participants' identity construction processes.

As explicated earlier, the analysis of the data will focus mainly on the interview excerpts, and will be supplemented with a few relevant social media posts. As set out in Chapters 2 and 3, the analysis will be guided by Baxter's (2007) *denotative* and *connotative* levels (presented in alternate sequence) and Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) three sociocultural linguistic principles of identity construction (*indexicality*, *positionality* and/or *relationality*). Baxter's (2007) *powerlessness-powerfulness* relations and Schippers' (2007) three *levels* of analysis for hegemonic femininities are also used, where relevant. To indicate the presence of these analytical frameworks, the respective principles applied will be italicised. It is also noted that the references for these relevant concepts will only be cited when they are first mentioned in the analysis, to avoid repetition. For the same reason, the demographic information about individual participants featured in the chapter will not be mentioned in detail before each analysis. This is to underscore the emergent nature of the participants' constructed identities and avoid "the tendency to presuppose the relevance of identity categories rather than systematically explicating their constitution in discourse" (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 85). References to each of the participants' demographic information can be found in Chapter 3 (Table 3.1).

4.4.1 Conforming to the dominant discourses of the 'good' mother

In this sub-section, I will discuss how the participants construct their identities by *positioning* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) themselves as conforming to the dominant

discourses of the 'good' mother. In other words, participants express their opinions and/or portray themselves in ways that are compatible with how a mother is normatively expected to be and do. The analysis of data in sections 4.4.1 and 4.4.2 will begin with the participants who *position* themselves as conforming most to the dominant discourses, followed by those who are conforming less. Of all nineteen participants, about three quarters largely frame themselves as conforming to the dominant discourses in various ways. This is undertaken in various ways, but two of the most common are: (a) portraying themselves as 'good' mothers; and (b) portraying themselves as not 'good' mothers but in ways that conform to the dominant discourses. These observations will be reflected in the following sub-sections.

(a) Constructing identities by portraying oneself as a 'good' mother

"I will try to always be there for my child"

(*Qisya*, turn 1244)

The data reveal two common ways through which most participants conceptualise and portray themselves as a 'good' mother. A 'good' mother is someone who (i) considers their child(ren)'s best interests; and (ii) has 'good' children.

(i) A 'good' mother = A mother who considers child(ren)'s best interests

Here, data will be analysed from those that arguably illustrate the 'ideal' ways 'good' mother identities are constructed to those that are interweaved with elements of struggles. The following Excerpt 4.1 is selected not only because it shows a very normative perception of the 'good' mother, but also because it is congruent with the participant's evaluation of herself:

Excerpt 4.1: *Qisya* [Those 'bad' mothers]

Turn	Speaker	Transcript
360.	Q	Bagi saya la, mak yang baik tu, dia akan always try to be there for dia punya children. *[For me la, the good mother, she will always try to be there for her children].*
361.	R	Mm hmm.
362.	Q	Contoh macam, saya pernah tengok, macam jadi depan mata sendiri la kan, mm anak dia menangis dia biarkan je, dia tengok TV, main phone apa semua. *[For example like, I have seen, like happened before my own eyes la right, mm her child cried she simply ignored, she watched TV, was busy with her phone and all].*
363.	R	Oo.
364.	Q	Aa and then macam biarkan je anak dia main sendiri-sendiri. *[Aa and then like simply let her child play on his/her own].*

At the *denotative* level (Baxter, 2007), Qisya assertively defines a 'good' mother through the use of linguistic features such as adverbs and exemplification. She describes a 'good' mother as someone who "*will always try to be there for dia punya [her] children*" (turn 360), with an emphasis on the temporal adverb "*always*". In her subsequent turn, she immediately provides an example, unprompted, which is an illustration of someone who does not "*always try to be there for her children"*. Her elucidation revolves around another mother who she has seen to be "*biarkan je [simply ignoring]"* her crying child (with an emphasis on the colloquial Malay adverb of manner "*je*" *[simply]*) (turn 362) while she was doing things other than attending to the child's needs. The same phrase "*biarkan je*" is repeated in turn 364. It can be seen that Qisya expects the mother to be more engaged with the child or at least monitoring him/her.

At the *connotative* level (Baxter, 2007), Qisya's example implies that she is constructing her mothering ideals in *relation* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) to the qualities of another mother whom she *positions* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) discursively as not a 'good' mother. It is interesting that such exemplification is done through the judgment of another mother's opposing mothering practices. The use of the adverbs and repeated phrases *connote* that Qisya *positions* herself as a person who has a *contrasting* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) and *relatively* more sensible mothering belief. The temporal element highlighted through the adverb "*always*" reinforces the unconditional commitment which Qisya suggests is a characteristic of the 'good' mother. In addition to this, her emphasis on the adverb "*je*", and the fact that she has seen the incident for herself, further reinforces the *authenticity* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) of her opinions,

thus implicitly reinforcing her *positioning* of herself as a person with *relatively* more *authorised* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) and, hence, *more powerful* (Baxter, 2007; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) 'good' motherhood views. Despite such judgment, it is unclear how Qisya *positions* her own mothering practices in *relation* to her definition and the mother in her example, until she evaluates herself later as,

> Kalau saya ni, jenis mak yanggg, saya akan cuba ad- sentiasa ada untuk anak saya.
> *[If I, the type of mother who, I will try to always be there for my child]*
> (*Qisya*, turn 1244).

Her parallel evaluation and portrayal of herself as someone who can materialise her own mothering ideals further strengthens her *relative powerfulness* and *connotes* that she perceives herself as a 'better' mother in *relation* to other mothers such as the one she exemplifies in Excerpt 5.1. Overall, Qisya's examples and evaluation of her self are constituted as 'absolute polarities', i.e. she constructs a 'good' mother as someone who is unconditionally present for her child in comparison to a 'bad' mother who is (unconditionally) absent.

To further illustrate this argument, the next excerpt focuses on one of Zara's Instagram posts. To see the congruence between her opinions about and portrayal of herself as the ''good' mother', it is essential to first understand how she conceptualises the term. Zara relates the quality of a 'good' mother to a mother's sincerity, which according to her,

> …will urmm, make it, make your urrmm priorities clear…. If you were sincere, you will prioritise your family, and by prioritising it means that using the best.
> (*Zara,* turns 513-515).

Her definition similarly captures the essence of Qisya's *position*, as it also revolves around the idea of prioritising children's best interests above all else. Zara, in fact, repeats the core word "*priority*" in both noun and verb forms three times in the definition. The way Zara portrays herself in the following Instagram post evidently represents her conceptualisation of the 'good' mother:

Post 4.1: *Zara* ["Trying my best" to be your 'good' mother]

Denotatively, Zara uses various linguistic features in the caption alongside the corresponding visual in this Instagram post to capture her feelings. The post is directed towards her two-month-old daughter, as seen in the way she addresses her daughter at the beginning as "*My lovely sweetheart*", and at the end as "*Miss Boolat [Miss Chubby]",* along with using the specific hashtag containing her daughter's name (#**********), and her consistent use of the second person singular pronouns "*you*" and "*your*". Such linguistic features create very intimate and affective tones between Zara and her daughter despite the relatively public nature of the social media platform and the fact that her baby cannot read the post at the time of posting. It can be noted that Zara explicitly uses the word "*priority*" in her post, in a similar way to her definition, and arguably the dominant motherhood discourses. In a list of all the positive traits that Zara endows upon her baby, she also includes in parentheses "*(except when you want milk, that's non-negotiable)*" and the metaphor "*I'd grow more hands if I could!"* in an exclamatory structure. Despite creating a humorous tone, such utterances understandably *denote* that she does experience some deficiencies in raising her daughter, and that her current mothering situation may not allow her to do as much as she actually wants to. She also explicitly expresses her ongoing aspiration to be "*a good mom*" to her children. In terms of visuals, the picture shows her daughter looking directly into the camera with a hint of a smile, and she is dressed in pink embroidered attire and a hairband hand made by Zara herself (Refer to Appendix 9).

Connotatively, Zara's caption shows that she explicitly orients closely to her identity as a mother and portrays herself in a very close *relation* to her daughter. Her daughter's direct gaze into the camera in the image complements the way Zara portrays herself since it gives the impression that the child is focused on her. Similar to the way Zara repeatedly mentions "*priority*" in her definition of a ''good' mother', the word "*priority*" in the post does not only *index* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) her strong orientation to the normative motherhood discourses but also her perception of herself as a 'good' mother. The accompanying picture further strengthens her portrayal of herself as such as the child looks happy and well-dressed. Her implicit reference to challenges, especially her use of the metaphor, displays the mobilisation of her identity to that of a 'great' mother who makes significant effort in mothering. Overall, this post, with its choice of visuals and various discursive features, shows that the 'good' mother is not constructed exclusively within the major themes of 'positivity' and 'responsibility', as typically observed on social media platforms, but is also interwoven with the theme of 'challenges'. This post also shows how normative 'good' mother identities are constructed congruently by most participants across different textual platforms. These arguments can be more explicitly analysed in the following interview excerpt by Zara and a Facebook post by Bernice.

As suggested in Post 4.1, a common topic associated with the challenge of motherhood is feeding, particularly breastfeeding (18 out of 19 participants talk about their breastfeeding experiences as challenges). The following excerpt is chosen because it illustrates how a participant may implicitly construct herself as a 'good' mother through describing her challenges in breastfeeding. The following conversation in Excerpt 4.2 follows Zara sharing her need for acknowledgement from her husband for breastfeeding their two children:

Excerpt 4.2: *Zara* ["A conscious decision"]

Turn	Speaker	Transcript
969.	Z	Macam because every decision I make is a conscious decision. *[Like because…].*
970.	R	Mm.
971.	Z	And weight having weight weighing the pro and cons.
972.	R	Uh huh.
973.	Z	So macam ok I could have simply give formula. *[So like ok I…].*
974.	R	Uh huh.
975.	Z	Macam senang hidup I, senang I nak tinggal anak. *[Like easy my life, easy to leave child].*
976.	R	Uhuh.
977.	Z	Senang tapi macam is that the best? Macam. *[Easy but like is that the best? Like].*
978.	R	Uhh.
979.	Z	Selagi I boleh breastfeed, macam that's the best I can I can give to the child, especially the 6 month tu macam, immunity purposes. *[So as long as I can breastfeed, like that's … month that like, immunity purposes].*
980.	R	Aaa.
981.	Z	For bonding purposes, so ok dah complete 6 month ni (unintelligible word) tak pressure sangat. *[…ok already complete 6 months this (unintelligible word) not too pressured].*

In the excerpt above, Zara underscores her decision to breastfeed through the use of an adverb, a rhetorical question as well as a few adjectives. She mentions phrases such as "*conscious decision*", and "*weight having weight weighing the pro and cons*" in turns 969 and 971, respectively. In turns 973 to 977, she describes how "*easy*" her life would have been if she had formula-fed her children with an emphasis on the adverb "*simply*" and the repeated adjective "*senang [easy]*". In turn 979, she then uses a rhetorical question "*but like is that the best?*" which implies her disagreement with the idea. She continues to assert that breastfeeding is the "*best*" thing that she can give to her children for "*immunity*" and "*bonding*" purposes. The adjective "*best*" is repeated twice in this excerpt. The excerpt ends with Zara stating that she now does not feel as pressured as she has completed the six months' breastfeeding milestone which is in line with medical recommendations for mothers of infants (Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2013).

Connotatively, similar to Qisya, Zara *positions* herself *contrastively* in *relation* to those who make a *different* motherhood decision, i.e. those who formula feed their child(ren). Unlike Qisya, who gives a personal example of another mother, Zara is rather implicit as she does not specify any mother in particular. Nonetheless, she

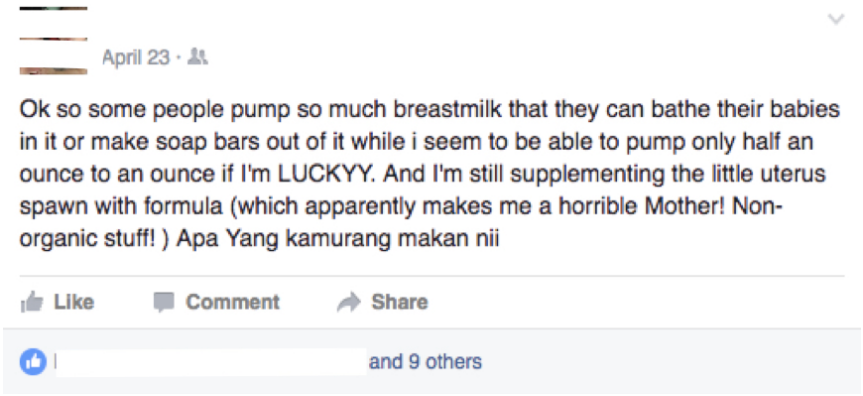
indexes her portrayal of herself as a 'good' mother by implicitly *relating* to other hypothetical mothers who she perceives as not making decisions that are as 'well thought-out' as hers and who formula feed out of convenience. As with Qisya, Zara thus indirectly depicts herself as not just a 'good', but also a 'better' mother than others. The fact that she substantiates her decision using scientifically and socially informed factors further reinforces her *position* as a 'good' and *relatively powerful* mother who makes a rational decision despite the associated difficulty. Her construction of herself as such in the excerpt matches the ways she describes herself in the interview as a "*passionate mom*" (turn 1433) and a mother who wants to be "*the best provider", "their best friend*" and the person who *"knows my child best, ...spends most time er with my child, my child is happiest with, ... my children look up to, ...my children can confide in"* (turns 1435 & 1439).

The association between the choice to breastfeed and the 'good' mother is prevalent among many other participants, even those who largely challenge the dominant discourses in the data (as will be discussed in the following section 4.4.2). An example of such a participant is Bernice, who in the following snippet expresses one of her views about the 'good' mother:

> I mean no judgement on anyone who can't, but if you can at least just supplement formula feeding….Once in a while with breastfeeding, it it would be really good *lah*.
>
> (*Bernice*, turns 606 to 610).

Although at the beginning of the clause Bernice shows compassion to mothers who cannot breastfeed, she then continues with a conditional statement that if it actually can be done, a 'good' mother is expected to "*at least*" try breastfeeding alongside formula feeding, thus abruptly shifting to a 'pro-breastfeeding' *position*. Bernice's post below further substantiates the importance of breastfeeding in her conceptualisation of a 'good' mother and shows how the associated challenges might be portrayed on social media amidst the largely positive motherhood-related posts about breastfeeding across all collected social media dataset.

Post 4.2: *Bernice* ["That makes me a horrible mother"]



Translation: "*Apa Yang kamurang makan nii*" *[What is it that you people eat]*.

In the post above, Bernice spells out her concerns over her lack of breast milk by using various phrases and deviations in spelling, capitalisation, structure, a rhetorical question, as well as humour and sarcasm. She relates herself to other mothers who produce "*so much breastmilk*" that their expressed milk can be utilised for purposes other than feeding their children, i.e. "*bathe their babies*" and "*make soap bars*". Although these situations may be perceived as exaggerated, these are real uses of excessive breast milk that are depicted on social media. In highlighting this marked difference in lactating abilities, she adds prominence to the word "*LUCKYY*" by capitalising it and adding an extra '*y*' in the spelling. She then relates to herself as someone who "*still*" has to supplement "*the little uterus spawn*", i.e. her son, with "*formula*" milk. The way she addresses her son as such creates a darkly humourous and dissatisfied tone. Within the same sentence, she adds *"(which apparently makes me a horrible Mother! Non-organic stuff!)*" in brackets. The word "*apparently*", the intensified negative connotation of the adjective "*horrible*" and the use of exclamation marks in both of the sentences in the parentheses imply Bernice's cynical orientation towards the idea. At the very end of the caption, Bernice poses a rhetorical question, "*Apa Yang kamurang makan nii*" *[What is it that you people eat]* (without a question mark) with the phrase "*kamurang* [*you people* – a plural reference and a colloquial word which literally combines 'kamu' (you) and 'orang' (people)]" being directed to those mothers who have a lot of breast milk. There is an extra letter "*i*" in the spelling of "*nii*" which is the colloquial terminology for the determiner "*ini*" (meaning "this") in Malay. These misspelled words intensify the sarcastic and frustrated tone of the post.

If these discursive features are to be interpreted exclusively on their own, they signify Bernice's venting about her inability to produce as much milk as others and reinforcing the dominant discourses that expect a mother to breastfeed – thus representing herself as a "*horrible*" mother. With reference to her definition in the interview snippet earlier, however, such features *connote* Bernice's disagreement with such stereotypical ideas and the tremendous pressure to conform to societal expectations for exclusive breastfeeding. In fact, it can be argued that she actually *positions* herself as a 'good' mother in this post as she clearly portrays herself as a mother who still supplements "*formula feeding….once in a while with breastfeeding*", even when she admittedly produces very little milk. Bernice may be using this post to humourously highlight her frustration at the gap between her own and the dominant ideas of what makes a 'good' mother, given that she is not defined as a 'good' mother by the latter's standards. Although very few participants specifically construct their identities on social media in a humourous and sarcastic way like Bernice, this post exemplifies how many participants draw on conflicting themes across the different textual platforms of research interviews and social media; in other words, they use intertextualised discourses. This argument will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7 (see section 7.4).

(ii) A 'good' mother = A mother who has 'good' children.

"*Your son is the product of you, your children is* [sic] *the product of your efforts.*"

(*Lippy Morgan*, turn 534)

The data also reveal how some participants' ideas and reported practices of motherhood revolve around the dominant idea that regards children as the marker of mothering capabilities. To explain this argument, the following Excerpt 4.3 by Lippy Morgan will be analysed. Lippy Morgan defines a 'good' mother as,

> someone who understands that the extent of her responsibility in protecting, in growing and ensuring the best interest of your child….in whatever form.
>
> (turns 474-6).

Excerpt 4.3 is selected in particular because Lippy Morgan makes very explicit reference to children as the products of a mother's efforts when responding to a

question that prompts her to evaluate if she is a 'good' mother. She first responds with "*I wish!"* (turn 504) and acknowledges that she is continuously trying to fulfil her own criteria before explicating that:

Excerpt 4.3: *Lippy Morgan* ["Taking an exam"]

Turn	Speaker	Transcript
516.	LM	I think you can only judge yourself, you're a good mother, in retrospect.
517.	R	Ok.
518.	LM	Rather than, "oh yeah, I'm doing a good job now".
519.	R	Hrmm.
520.	LM	Yeah you try your best.
521.	R	Yeah.
522.	LM	To be a good mother. Just don't look just think just try to be a good mother all the time and you will only know the results in 20 years. It's just like taking an exam, right?
523.	R	Yea (laughs).
524.	LM	You study really hard.
525.	R	Alright.
526.	LM	You sit for the test.
527.	R	(laughs).
528.	LM	And then can I say are you a good writer, are you a good lawyer, are you good a good doctor? Are you a good phd (unintelligible word)?
529.	R	(laughs)
530.	LM	You can only know when the result comes up.
531.	R	Yeah.
532.	LM	It works the same, to me.
533.	R	Hu uh. Ok.
534.	LM	Your son is the product of you, your children is the product of your efforts.

In this excerpt, Lippy Morgan justifies her opinions about what makes a 'good' mother through the use of adverbial and noun phrases, rhetorical questions and an analogy. She avoids giving a clear 'yes/no' answer to my question but rather constructs her perception in conditional terms through the thrice-repeated use of the adverb "*only*" (turns 516, 522 and 530). The condition is constructed in temporal terms, indicated by the use of phrases that indicate time such as the noun "*retrospect*" (turn 516), and adverbial phrases "*now*" (turn 518), "*all the time*" (turn 522), and "*in 20 years*" (turn 522). In turn 522, Lippy Morgan compares the journey of motherhood to "*taking an exam*" to validate her opinions. She first introduces this analogy at the end of turn 522 in a rhetorical question to elicit the researcher's agreement. She then continues to clarify in detail what she means in turns 524 to 530, which can be interpreted as – "you prepare yourself well to be a mother…. you try your best as you go through

motherhood (the test)….You can only know (if you are a 'good' mother) when your children become adults (the result/s)". She reaffirms this later by stating that "*it works the same, to me*" (turn 532) and "*your son is the product of you*" (turn 534) with the pronouns "*your*" and "*you*" here presumably referring to all mothers in general. The nouns '*product/s*" and "*result/s*" which refer to children are repeated twice within this excerpt. Lippy Morgan expresses her opinions in a very matter-of-fact tone, supported by her consistent use of present tense verbs (to present facts) and the definitive future tense verb "*will*" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2018).

Connotatively, Lippy Morgan also constructs herself in close relation to her child, though in slightly different ways to Qisya and Zara earlier. She does this by evaluating the mother entirely based on how the children turn out in the future. Lippy Morgan makes repeated explicit reference to children as "*result/s*" and "*products*" of mothers, as well as incorporating temporal elements, which *index* children as a form of investment and development which will show returns over time and eventually determine how 'good' the investors (the parent/s) are. This metaphor *indexes* that the value of a person (and the investors, i.e. parents) is often evaluated through performance such as in education, career, family and more expanded social networks. This interpretation is supported by evidence later in the interview. When asked about an example of a person that she regards as a 'good' mother, she quotes her mother and reiterates,

> You I can tell that she's a good mom, because all her kids are grown up… You can see the product of it.
>
> (*Lippy Morgan,* turns 624-626).

In fact, preceding this conversation, when asked who influences her 'good' mother beliefs, she also quotes her mother stating that,

> She raised us well. And I I'm very grateful for that. Erm we're not perfect, nobody is perfect. But I'm very grateful that I understand that she always ha brought us up to have good values. Number one. Number two is to always work hard. Number three is always be kind to people and and she also, I observe lah, she always put her children in front of, I mean ahead of her.
>
> (*Lippy Morgan,* turn 498).

These utterances strengthen the argument that Lippy Morgan is confident with her belief because she sees herself as the 'product' of 'good' mothering; she is now a person who has "*good values*", "*works hard*" and is "*kind to other people*". Besides constructing herself in *relation* to her child (and her own mother), she also *positions* herself in *relation* to other hypothetical mothers. By presenting the analogy of an exam, Lippy Morgan *positions* herself as a mother with *relative power* as she implicitly *delegitimises* others with *different* opinions (Baxter, 2007; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Overall, even though she does not directly label herself as a 'good' mother, she *positions* herself as a mother who aspires to be one in the future.

Other mothers who share similar sentiments, albeit more implicitly, are Tasha and Yaya. Tasha, for example, states that the proof of ''good' mothering' is evident in the happiness of the child(ren),

> Kalau macam, you can see kan tau from the anak, if the anak is happy, then then she's she did a good job, is it?
> *[If like, you can see right from the child, if the child is…?]*
>
> (*Tasha*, turn 960).

She then adds "*Er so when I see N is happy, I'm happy…. So I know like I did a good job with my anak if he's happy*" (turns 978-980). She, in fact, evaluates herself in a positive light at the end of the interview as "*a wonderful mother*" (turn 2289). In a similar way to Lippy Morgan, Tasha's 'good' mothering beliefs and practices match the dominant 'good' mother discourses which regard children as a reflection of the mothers' efforts. Many other participants also construct their identities around this dominant discourse. Tasha, however, constructs herself as a 'good' mother in the present, whilst Lippy Morgan illustrates how a mother constructs her identities in future terms.

(b) Constructing identities by portraying oneself not as a 'good' mother in ways that conform to the dominant discourses of the 'good' mother

As mentioned earlier, expressing opinions that conform to the dominant discourses about what makes a 'good' mother does not necessarily mean that the participants necessarily conceive of themselves as 'good' mothers. In such incongruent

constructions of the self, participants reflect on their own weaknesses in mothering to clarify their aspirations to be a 'good' mother. To illustrate this, I will analyse an interview excerpt by Dyana:

Excerpt 4.4: *Dyana* [Unlike me]

Turn	Speaker	Transcript
456.	D	(unintelligible) mmm I rase good mother tu die macam, satu die penyabar la… *[(unintelligible) mmm I think a good mother she is like, one thing she is patient la…].*
457.	R	Penyabar. *[Patient].*
458.	D	Ha ah…I mean, kalau macam kepale angin macam I, belum anak sebenarnye tak buat salah pon, cume bile diorang gad-, ah macam bile I nampak tum- bende tu tumpah semue I akan terus macam, kenape tumpah semue, sedangkan sebenarnye bukannye die yang buat. *[Ha ah…I mean, if like short-tempered like me, the child has not actually done anything wrong anyway, it's just when they fight-, ah like when I see that thing spills and all I will immediately be like, why spill it all, whereas actually it's not him who did it].*
459.	R	Ohhh.
460.	D	Haaa macam, tak boleh nak patient I macam terus akan (unintelligible). *[Haaa like, cannot be patient I like would immediately (unintelligible)].*
461.	R	Hmm mmm.
462.	D	I mean, mungkin susah kan, tapi macam, you kene calm la .Hurrmm the first thing tu die kene calm supaye, I mean they can make the next judgement, ha yang macam tu a good mother lah ah… *[I mean, maybe difficult right, but like, you must be calm la hurrmm the first thing that she must be calm so that, I mean they can make the next judgment, ha (a person) who is like that is a good mother lah ah…*

When prompted, Dyana describes a 'good' mother as someone who is "*patient*" (turn 456), an opinion that she linguistically expresses through certain clauses, idiomatic expressions, negative statements and tones. In the subsequent utterance, she exemplifies what she means using a short story of her own mistake in mothering, i.e. scolding her children. Her portrayal of herself as impatient is strengthened by the fact that she includes clauses like "*belum anak sebenarnya tak buat salah pun [the kid has not actually done anything wrong anyway]*" and "*sedangkan sebenarnya bukannya dia yang buat [whereas actually it's not him who did it]*" which are attributed to her description of herself as "*kepala angin [short-tempered]*" (turn 458). It must be noted that "*kepala angin*" is a widely-used idiomatic expression in Malay which is translated

directly as “head wind” in English. It may indicate not only a short temper but also inconsistent behaviours. The expression intensifies the inherently negative tone of her utterances in turns 458 to 460. Dyana relates her example to her definition by saying that she “*tak boleh nak patient [cannot be patient]*” and the adverb “*terus [immediately]*” *denotes* that she has little control over her temper. Despite these difficulties, however, Dyana advises that a ‘good’ mother “*kena calm” [must be calm]*” (turn 462).

Connotatively, by openly admitting her apparent mistakes, Dyana constitutes herself as not being a ‘good’ mother in *relation* to the dominant motherhood discourses, which she understands as expecting mothers to be unconditionally loving and patient. Although she constructs herself in this way, she later prescribes what a mother should do, which is validated by the lesson she has learnt from her own mothering mistakes. In doing so, her *position* of *relative powerlessness* (Baxter, 2007), i.e. the identity of not a ‘good’ mother for losing temper with her children, transforms into a *position* of *relative powerfulness*, i.e. the identity of a *relatively* experienced mother with more valid advice, compared to other hypothetical mothers who may not have learnt how to be a ‘better’ mother like her. Overall, although Dyana portrays herself as trying to conform to the dominant ‘good’ motherhood discourses, her construction of self is more incongruent and ‘self-critical’ as manifested through multiple and intersecting discourses. It can be said that the majority of participants indeed *position* themselves in such a way across different parts of their interviews. All in all, most of the participants are found to be *positioning* themselves as conforming to the dominant motherhood discourses through complex discursive avenues.

4.4.2 Challenging the dominant discourses of the ‘good’ mother

Based on the previous analysis, I acknowledge that most of the participants construct their identities by *positioning* themselves as largely conforming to the dominant motherhood discourses. In so doing, they are perpetuating the legitimisation not only of their own actions, but also those dominant discourses themselves. Some other participants, however, take a more critical stance towards dominant discourses of motherhood, and this should not be ignored because these instances add interesting dimensions to the negotiations of their identities and to the constructed nature of these

discourses themselves. Such critical negotiations, in fact, problematise the notion of the ‘‘good’ mother’. Of all nineteen participants, about a third are often seen as challenging the dominant discourses. They *position* themselves as challenging the dominant ‘good’ mother discourses in multifaceted ways but two of the most common are by: (a) portraying themselves as ‘good’ mothers but in ways that challenge the dominant discourses; and (b) portraying themselves as not ‘good’ mothers.

(a) Constructing identities by portraying oneself as a ‘good’ mother in ways that challenge the dominant discourses

“*We’re just being the real parents*”

(*Eva*, Instagram post)

Through my initial analysis, I discovered that challenging the discourses of the ‘‘good’ mother’ does not necessarily mean that the participants represent themselves as ‘bad’ mothers. Of all participants, Eva and Jasmin are found to construct their identities in this way. To illustrate this argument, I will focus on Eva’s interview and social media data. The following Excerpt 4.5 (a) is chosen because it shows how Eva clearly rejects the dominant motherhood discourses whilst simultaneously portraying herself as a ‘good’ mother. Here, Eva is specifically responding to a question asking if she was ever negatively judged by others on her mothering decisions:

Excerpt 4.5 (a): *Eva* [“I’m not being a fake”]

Turn	Speaker	Transcript
893.	R	Kalau negative? Do you have like any negative experiences when people say things to you, like “Why do you do that?” That’s (unintelligible word). [*If negative?....]*
894.	E	Got, got, yeah because they always said that okay, because we are um, we like to, we are very socialise kind of person
895.	R	Mm hmm
896.	E	We always go to places with uh uh a lot of people, um sometimes uh we like to hang out at the bar, I I mean only like a bar, not like a club.
897.	R	(laughs)
898.	E	I won’t bring my daughter to a club, but even going to the bar people will said “You shouldn’t bring your daughter there”.
899.	R	Ooo
900.	E	“You are uh you are about to like – you are teaching her the life of being like that in the future,”
901.	R	Ooooo
902.	E	I said uh, “Okay”, I said “I’m not, I’m not being a I’m bot being a fake here,” I said “I don’t want – I want I just want to be the real person I am,” I said uh, and at the same time said uh, “You you are drinking while you are holding your baby,” some some people said that to me, I said, “My baby is not drinking with me,” I said
903.	R	Hmm
904.	E	I said, “My baby is not drinking with me, so what’s the issue here?” I said. …

In the excerpt above, Eva uses particular features of Malaysian English to portray herself as a 'good' mother who challenges the dominant discourses. At the *denotative* level, in response to my question in turn 893, Eva responds with *"Got, got, yeah…"* (turn 894) with the repetition of the verb "*got"* – a typical informal expression in Malaysian English - indicating existence and agreement (Baskaran, 1987). This could be interpreted as Eva's attempt to convey that she has indeed been judged, without necessarily referring to the past tense function of the verb 'get'. Within the same turn, she states, *"…we are very socialise kind of person"* (turn 894). Terms related to the core word "social" (or "*sosial*" in Malay), as in "*socialise*" here, typically carry a negative connotation in both colloquial Malay and Malaysian English in Malaysia, because they imply excessive socialisation among men and women in inappropriate settings (*Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka*, 2018). In turn 896, Eva continues explaining that, "*…sometimes uh we like to hang out at the bar…*". Here, the association between the word "*socialise*" and Eva's state of being judged is clear through the explicit mention of the word "*bar*". This is because a bar is stereotypically regarded as a setting deemed unsuitable for children, especially in Malaysia where attitudes towards establishments that serve alcoholic drinks are relatively conservative. Eva clarifies her decision rather defensively, *"…I mean only like a bar, not like a club"*, with an emphasis on the words "*only"* and "*not*". The word "*club*" in this context refers to "a place where people dance late at night" (Cambridge Essential English, 2011) which is typically associated with more negative behaviours among its visitors compared to a bar because it involves not only drinking but also dancing and possibly, from the perspective of Malaysian social norms, excessive socialisation between people of different sexes. Eva's words here *denote* her awareness that taking her child into a bar might be perceived as transgressive in Malaysian society. *Connotatively*, Eva's choices of words in turns 894 and 896 together *index* Eva's *position* as a mother who appears to be a victim of regular negative judgments. They also *connote* that she orients to the identity of a mother who is *powerless* and susceptible to such judgments by Malaysian society in general.

In this paragraph, I shall continue with how Eva's identities are mobilised and *contrasted* with one another in her portrayal of self as a 'good' mother. After reiterating that she would not take her child to a club and narrating the exact disparaging judgments she has received in direct speech format (turns 898 and 900),

Eva starts to portray herself differently in turn 902: *"I'm not, I'm not being a I'm not being a fake here…. I just want to be the real person I am".* Here, the words "*fake*" and "*real*" are emphasised in a definite tone. In addition, Eva draws on one of the peripheral discourses of 'judgments and views', namely 'me vs others', in the way she clearly distinguishes her views from others by overtly and *contrastively* mentioning the noun "*people*" and first-person pronoun "*I*". In turn 904, Eva reinforces her strong feelings by using the rhetorical question, "*so what's the issue here?*".

These discursive features strengthen Eva's defence of her decision, and *connote* that Eva portrays herself as a person who makes sensible mothering decisions in *relation* to hypothetical and 'hypocritical' others. In doing so, Eva mobilises her identities, from the ones that she oriented to earlier – the identity of a 'victim' and, therefore, a relatively *powerless* mother (in turn 894) - to the opposing identity of an 'empowered' and, thus, a relatively more *powerful* mother (by adamantly defending her decision from turn 896 onwards). As Eva orients towards this *contrasting* identity, from *powerless* to *powerful*, she implicitly assumes the identity of a 'good' mother who is defined by her own more 'practical' standards, simultaneously subverting what it means to be a 'good' mother. This argument can be better understood by linking it to one of the qualities found in Eva's definition of a 'good' mother - *"a mother shouldn't be very protective*" (turn 618) - which challenges dominant discourses of the 'good' mother. Her choice of bringing her daughter to a bar, therefore, can be deciphered as her way of being a 'good' mother, one who is not too protective of her child. When asked if she fits into her own 'good' mother ideals, Eva admits that, "*I do all that, actually*" (turn 648). Although she is describing who she is (not a '*fake'*, i.e. *authentic*), by implication, she is simultaneously *denaturalising* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) others as '*unreal'* for their judgments. Eva's questioning tone also implies her perception that her decisions should not be a matter of dispute in the first place. All these strategies reinforce the argument that her identities in this excerpt and many parts of her interview are constructed in *contrast* to those who judge her. Furthermore, it can be argued that the *fake-real* dichotomy and the discursive features that Eva has emphasised are her ways of suggesting that her 'good' mother ideas are more *real* than others'. This, hence, can be inferred as Eva's attempt to portray herself as not only a 'good' mother but also, perhaps a 'better' mother compared to those "*fake*" mothers who she seems to presume are not being themselves to live up to societal 'good'

mother expectations. It could be argued that the 'me versus others' discourse is, to a certain extent, created in this excerpt as a result of the interview questions. Although the questions do initiate the topic discussion, Eva naturally opens up, without further prompting, about her perceptions of such judgments in many parts of the interview. Eva's utterances here demonstrate the powerful impact of others' and her own judgments regarding conflicting mothering styles. These judgements influence the ways she discursively constructs herself, drawing on discourses related to 'familial and societal roles' and more specific ones such as the ''good' mother' and 'me/us vs others'. Through these multiple and interweaving discourses, Eva critically challenges societal 'good' mother ideals, and this is seen consistently across her utterances in Excerpt 4.5 (a) and the following Excerpt 4.5 (b).

The plurality of discourses that Eva draws upon in constructing her various identities are also evident in her use of social media. An analysis of the following excerpt will substantiate this argument and also help to clarify the issue of how Eva received the judgments in the first place, and the platforms through which those judgments were conveyed to her:

Excerpt 4.5 (b): *Eva* [That photo on Instagram]

Turn	Speaker	Transcript
910.	E	… yeah I got this recently,
911.	R	Uh huh
912.	E	Um I post something on my Instagram, so uh we are we are at the bar, that time is weekdays, so nobody there in the bar,
913.	R	(laughs)
914.	E	So we're quite lucky on that day, so there's in inside there is no is a non-smoking area so we just bring her because we have uh we just came back from Kuching two two days ago, so, uh, we went to this Irish bar (laughs) my daughter is there, my husband and (unintelligible words) very tired, after carrying walking around by the riverside, so, so I took a photo that, uh to show uh my family, and then I also post a photo of us at the bar, so uh someone uh comment on my photos, uh was saying that uh uh, 'That's not a place for babies' said like that, and then I said uh, 'Um it's not an issue, she's drinking milk' I said.

Denotatively, it can be understood in this excerpt that Eva makes her visit to the bar known to others through her Instagram post and it is through the same platform that she receives the associated judgments (signalled by the word "*this*" in turn 910). Eva provides a descriptive narrative about her family's visit to the bar – visiting on a weekday and thus at a quiet time ["*nobody there in the bar*" (turn 912)], sitting in a non-smoking area ["*there is no is a non-smoking area"* (turn 914)] and visiting in the first place because they were "*very tired, after carrying walking around by the*

riverside" (turn 914). Each of these statements attempt to justify their parenting decision. Eva adds at the end of the excerpt that *"...it's not an issue, she's drinking milk*" to counter someone's judgment on her post.

Connotatively, the ways Eva defends her parenting decision show how she reinforces the identity of a 'good' mother and responsible parent, whilst combining the identity of an active Instagram user. This is constructed by listing the reasons they visited the bar, and the decisions they made regarding where they sat. Her *positioning* of self here is implied through a number of intersecting discourses, such as those within the themes of 'judgments', 'the 'good' mother', 'social media' (Instagram), 'responsibility' (the responsible choices they have made), 'familial and social relations' (the judgments and need to share family stories with others on Instagram), and 'challenges' (tiredness from walking and carrying the child). Eva's relative *powerfulness* is also inferred as her responses in the interview are not merely her unexpressed sentiments, but capture the essence of her actual responses to the person who judged her on the social media, as depicted in the following Instagram post:

Post 4.3: *Eva* [The "'real' parents"]

In this Instagram post, Eva writes a short caption with a few hashtags and posts an image of her husband and her daughter at a bar. The caption says, "*We're just being the real parents*", which according to Eva, *"this is the new re-upload*" (turn 1084). This means she had already posted the picture but later deleted it to remove the judgments visible in the comments section. This re-uploaded post is evidently clear from any comments. Eva also uses the word "*real"* in this post along with the adverb

"*just*" to describe the kind of parents they are. The caption, moreover, evidences Eva's use of specific hashtags for her daughter indicating her name (#****** *onthego*) and developmental stage (*#19months*). In terms of visuals, the post has a picture of her husband holding a mobile phone and an alcoholic drink (deciphered through the alcoholic drink label on the glass and from Eva's responses in her interview), with another alcoholic drink (presumably Eva's) and her daughter holding playing cards.

These different multimodal aspects together *connote* Eva's sense of agency – that she wishes to portray herself as a '*real*' parent, which corresponds to the way she describes herself in the interview. It is worth noting here that the decision to upload and re-upload the same picture as well as rewrite the caption can be interpreted as Eva's way of challenging the situation, by using the same platform through which she was *delegitimised* to challenge the 'aggressor'. In this way, Eva asserts her *powerfulness* in *relation* to those who judge her, thus reclaiming her *legitimacy* in the digital public sphere. Since social media platforms like Instagram have features that allow users to add, edit and delete their posts, the platform allows participants to contest *legitimacy* of the self. Overall, Eva coherently constructs various identities associated with 'good' motherhood through her '*genuine'* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) and congruent self-presentation in a hybrid of private-public platforms. Eva's post powerfully exemplifies the complementary role social media play in most participants' construction of identities in interviews. The significance of social media in identity construction in motherhood will be further unpacked in this and subsequent analysis chapter(s). Overall, the excerpts from Eva's data illustrate the complex ways new mothers may construct their identities by portraying themselves as 'good' mothers whilst simultaneously challenging the dominant motherhood discourses.

(b) Constructing identities by portraying oneself as not a 'good' mother

"*I ahhmmm the mum that still wants to try something to do something for her*"

(*Vera*, turn 224)

Participants also *position* themselves as challenging the discourses of the 'good' mother by portraying themselves as not 'good' mothers. I will exemplify this argument with two excerpts by Vera, an excerpt by Cathy and one Facebook post by Bernice.

Excerpts 4.6 (a) and 4.6 (b) are chosen because they show the participant's clear resistance to evaluating herself as a 'good' mother by both her own and societal ideals of the 'good' mother. The following excerpt shows Vera's responses to the question of whether she fits her own definition of a 'good' mother. Preceding this exchange, Vera acknowledged that she did not believe that a definition of a ''good' mother' existed, but later expressed that a 'good' mother is one who tries her best for her child(ren) – a conceptualisation that aligns with dominant motherhood discourses.

Excerpt 4.6 (a): *Vera* [Doing "something for myself"]

Turn	Speaker	Transcript
221.	R	Ok…urmm…can you give an example of, oh sorry, do you think that you have that quality that you are a mother who is trying to to be the best for your baby…you.
222.	V	(Laughs) Personally I don't think so.
223.	R	(Laughs) Ok ok.
224.	V	I think I am…I think I I ahhmmm the mum that still wants to try something to do something for her.
225.	R	Ok.
226.	V	And I'm not the mum that will put her on everything first. …

In Excerpt 4.6 (a), Vera resists portraying herself as a 'good' mother by using linguistic features like negative statements and temporal adverbs. I first ask her if she fits her own definition of a 'good' mother and she quickly responds with laughter and a definitive answer, *"Personally I don't think so"* (turn 222). This utterance *denotes* Vera's certainty in perceiving herself as a mother who does not try to be the best for her child. Despite some hesitation at the beginning of turn 224, Vera then confidently continues to describe herself as, "*the mum that still wants to try something to do something for her"* whilst emphasising the temporal adverb "*still*". Within the context of this utterance, the gender-specific third-person singular pronoun "*her*" used as an object in this structure can be understood as referring to Vera herself, not her daughter. Similar to turn 224, Vera's utterance in turn 226 also carries semantically the same meaning in relation to her priorities as a mother.

At the *connotative* level, Vera's repeated and *contrastive positioning* of herself in relation to her normative 'good' mother definition *connotes* that she evaluates herself as not a 'good' mother in *relation* to dominant 'good' mother standards and other mothers in general. A combination of Vera's definite response, her accompanying laughter and hesitation signifies that Vera is fully aware of her *position* as a mother

whose mothering practices conflict with the dominant discourses. Also, Vera's temporally manifested *positioning* of herself *indexes* her implicit orientation to her own past identity as a non-mother – a person who, presumably, primarily prioritised her own welfare - and to maintaining her 'old' self now even after becoming a mother. This also *connotes* that her current level of 'selfishness' remains unchanged although she has given birth to and is responsible for a child, unlike the stereotypical portrayal of mothers as selfless. Vera, therefore, draws on several intersecting discourses in discursively portraying herself. Overall, the excerpt shows Vera's negotiations of multiple identities in *relation* to others and her own past and current selves. Vera also *contrasts* herself in *relation* to one specific person:

Excerpt 4.6 (b): *Vera* ["I'm not 'that' mother"]

Turn	Speaker	Transcript
226.	V	…. Because I can see the difference between myself and my sister-in-law. My sister-in-law is that mother. That I can tell you.
	-	(3 turns omitted)
230.	V	So I'm not that mother. I am still, the adult in me still needs (laughs) something for her.
231.	R	I see I see.
		(4 turns omitted)
236.	V	…. Yeah…so she will be the one who puts everything the son come first.
237.	R	Ohh…would you want to be that kind of mother?
238.	V	Noo..no no (Laughs). To keep my sanity, no (Laughs).

In Excerpt 4.6 (b) Vera illustrates "*the mum*" that she mentioned earlier in turn 226 by explicitly citing her sister-in-law and uses features like negative statements, nouns, verbs, adverbs and laughter to reinforce her opinions. Vera states, "…*because I can see the difference between myself and my sister-in-law. My sister-in-law is that mother*" with the overt mentioning of the word "*difference*" and an emphasis on the determiner "*that*" which refers to the qualities of a 'good' mother that she defined earlier. Vera continues to distance herself from this definition with the statement, "*So I'm not that mother*" (turn 230) with the determiner "*that"* and the noun *"mother*" emphasised again. She continues, "*I am still, the adult in me still needs (laugh) something for her*" (also expressed earlier in Excerpt 4.6 (a) – turn 224), with an emphasis on the determiner "*the",* the gender- and role-neutral noun "*adult*", the verb "*needs*" and the continued use of the adverb "*still*". The verb "*needs*" here carries a more powerful illocutionary force than the verb "*wants*" (turn 224) seen earlier, as it emphasises a stronger sense of importance. In turn 236, Vera reiterates her certainty that her sister-in-law fits into her 'good' mother definition: "*the one who puts everything the son*

comes first". Nevertheless, when asked if she wants to be 'that' kind of mother, Vera confidently replies, *"Noo...no no (laughs). To keep my sanity, no (laughs)"* with the clear marker of disagreement "*no*" being repeated four times, the accompanying laughter and the emphasis on the word "*sanity*".

Connotatively, these discursive features strengthen the construction of Vera's identities in relation to how *different* she is from another social actor, in this case her sister-in-law. Vera's consistent use of determiners underscores the level of *difference* rather than *similarity* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), and also reinforces Vera's continued attempt to portray herself in *opposition* to wider motherhood discourses. Vera's use of strong modal verbs further *connotes* her sense of *powerfulness* through a sense of agency. Related to this claim, Vera's negotiation of identities from the "*mother"* to the "*adult*" indicates her attempt to detach herself from the identity of a mother and her wish to be perceived as a person, free of gender- and role-specific responsibilities. This argument is further strengthened by her confident negation at the end of the excerpt, which indicates that Vera has no intention to orient towards such an identity in the future.

There are some other inferences that can be made from this discussion of Vera's construction of identities. First, despite continually challenging the dominant 'good' mother discourses in various ways, it can be seen in Excerpt 4.6 (a) and (b) that Vera generally orients to the role of a mother, though portraying herself as an unconventional one. Another interesting observation is that Vera's persistent *contrastive positioning* in *relation* to her sister-in-law and dominant discourses may not suggest that Vera perceives herself as a 'bad' mother. This could, in fact, be Vera's very implicit way of suggesting that sanity is another quality of a 'good' mother, the quality that is absent in her sister-in-law. While *positioning* herself in *contrast* to dominant motherhood discourses, Vera seems very much at ease with the fact that her mothering practices do not match her 'good' mother ideals. Such a unique construction of identities is not found in other parts of the dataset, except for certain parts of Cathy's interview, though this appears in rather different ways.

To further support my argument, I will therefore briefly analyse Cathy's utterances in Excerpt 4.7. Cathy's definition of a 'good' mother is one who:

> …gives her best and prov- provide for the child's needs, like tries her best to meet the child's needs…
>
> (*Cathy*, turn 512).

Similar to Vera, Cathy's definition parallels the dominant discourses. Furthermore, Cathy too portrays herself as a mother in *contrast* to another individual:

Excerpt 4.7: *Cathy* ["Doing more mothering"]

Turn	Speaker	Transcript
584.	C	(laughs) I think uh (coughs) she is doing more mothering than I do.
585.	R	Okay (laughs).
586.	C	With Kevin, we're pretty much like, hmm casual selamba everything. *[…casual, casual everything].*
-		(14 turns omitted)
601.	R	Okay. But whatever that you do, or didn't do, that's your best, right?
602.	C	(laughs).
603.	R	But you feel that someone else might have given their best which is more than what you give, is it?
604.	C	Yeah definitely (laughs).

In this case, Cathy describes herself using certain discursive features like comparative adjectives, clear agreement and disagreement markers, and laughter. For example, the comparative word "*more"* (turn 584) is used to show her *different* identity as a mother compared to her sister. Unlike Vera, who provides a very certain answer to a similar question, Cathy merely laughs when asked if she fits her own definition of a 'good' mother (turns 601 and 602), a response that can be inferred as a "no". But when asked to clarify her responses, Cathy responds in turn 604 with a clear agreement marker "*Yeah"* and adverb "*definitely"* whilst continuing to laugh. The laughter may be a mark of her agreement in the context of this conversation, but she also shows no attempt to suggest that she fits her own criteria of a 'good' mother in other parts of her interview. By implication, the discursive features seen here potentially express Cathy's perception of herself as doing '*less'* mothering than her sister, and perhaps other mothers as well. Similar to Vera, Cathy confidently rejects the identity of a 'good' mother.

The following Facebook post shows how a participant may also portray oneself as not a 'good' mother on social media. The post is by Bernice, who shared with her Facebook friends details of her trip to watch a movie without her son:

Post 4.4*: Bernice* [Abandoning "maternal instincts"]

There are three multimodal aspects that I would like to examine in Post 4.4: the caption, the picture and the hashtag. The caption *"Not looking at me because I abandoned all maternal instinct to go out to watch a movie"* relates to the picture, which shows her son's rather emotionless expression with his eyes half-open, and her mother's hand on the left-hand side. *Connotatively*, Bernice uses self-deprecating humour through the caption and picture and this can be interpreted as her way of orienting to the identity of a 'bad' mother and making fun of the discrepancy between her own and the dominant 'good' mother discourses. This demonstrates that Bernice acknowledges the typical expectation that a woman who has an infant should not leave her baby in the care of someone else just to go to a movie – an activity which is associated with self-indulgent pleasure rather than maternal commitment. Given that she posted this on a social media platform, Bernice possibly intends to portray herself as 'unmotherly', signifying her sense of agency and *relative powerfulness*. For this post, she received 21 'likes' and three comments, all of which were positive with one of her 'friends' expressing amazement because she herself had not been to the cinema for four years.

On the other hand, Bernice's use of the phrase '*maternal instinct*' and inclusion of the hashtag '*#baby*******' at the end of the caption suggest that she still strongly identifies as a mother (similar to Eva in Post 4.3), despite the meaning of the caption. In the interview, however, Bernice does mention that "*I think subconsciously, I try to portray that I'm not a good mom"* (turn 256), which supports the claim that she might

purposely want to portray herself as not 'motherly' in the normative sense in this post. Although this is an uncommon way of constructing identities across the dataset, the complexities suggest that some participants orient to the 'good' mother sub-theme in more ambivalent ways.

4.4.3 Ambivalent ways of responding to the dominant discourses of the 'good' mother

> *"When you become a mother, uhh, to hell [with] all those routine"*
>
> (*Zara*, turn 1181)

Some participants construct their identities by framing themselves as ambivalently conforming to and challenging the dominant discourses of the 'good' mother. Of all nineteen participants, about three quarters responded ambivalently to the dominant discourses of motherhood in various ways. To illustrate this line of argument, I will analyse interview excerpts from Bernice, Zara and Intan. Beginning with Bernice, she shares her 'good' mother ideals as follows:

Excerpt 4.8: *Bernice* ["A sense of 'balance'"]

Turn	Speaker	Transcript
494.	B	Emmm, I feel now I think, a good mother would be able to aa, have a sense of balance.
495	R	Aaa
496.	B	between taking care of the child and taking care of herself,
497.	R	A'aa
498.	B	it's not just about being a hundred percent there for the kid, you gotta think think for yourself jugak la. *[it's not just about being a hundred percent there for the kid, you gotta think think for yourself too la.]*
499.	R	A'aa
500.	B	I would also there's a good mother would also be able to balance – balance la, the word like balance work, balance taking care of the family,
501.	R	A'aa
502.	B	and actually maintaining a healthy relationship with the husband
503	R	Aaa
504.	B	I feel that would be it, and erm also I feel a good mother there's no clear like cookie-cutter definition of it la
505.	R	Hmm
506.	B	but I feel like a good mother shouldn't judge lah I suppose how other people mother their own kids macam *[but I feel like a good mother shouldn't judge lah I suppose how other people mother their own kids like]*

At the *denotative* level, Bernice repeats certain nouns to underscore her opinions about the 'good' mother. Bernice responds with "*Emmm, I feel now I think, a good mother would be able to aa, have a sense of balance*" (turn 494). The noun "*balance*" is repeated five times, with four occurrences in turn 500 referring to different aspects of a mother's life. A 'good' mother must have 'balance' in "*herself"* (turns 496 & 498), "*work"* (turn 500), and "*family"* (turn 500). She later elaborates by adding descriptions about the ways a 'good' mother could be 'balanced', that is by "*maintaining a healthy relationship with the husband*" (turn 502) and not judging "*how other people mother their own kids*" (turn 506). Interestingly, in between these two turns, Bernice abruptly states that "*there's no clear like cookie-cutter definition of*" (turn 504) a 'good' mother but immediately reverts to elaborating her earlier point.

Connotatively, the word "*balance*" *indexes* Bernice's *position* as someone whose views about the 'good' mother challenge the dominant discourses. This is because the word "*balance*" itself is rarely associated with the normative notion of a 'good' mother, because it opposes the expectation of altruism. Furthermore, the repeated emphasis on the different aspects of being 'balanced', along with her elaboration in turn 498, signifies that Bernice confidently draws on the discrepancy between her views and dominant motherhood discourses. It also shows that Bernice acknowledges that the identities of a mother are constructed in *relation* to the mother's many other identities related to *relationships*, such as with other children, family members, one's husband, and other mothers. Bernice's abrupt uncertainty in defining the ''good' mother' in turn 504, nonetheless, shows that she temporarily mobilises her identities, from a *position* of someone with idealistic views (that a 'good' mother has to be 'balanced') to someone possessing more *realistic* opinions (that a 'good' mother cannot be clearly defined), and immediately reverts to the former *position* in the subsequent turn. Bernice thus attempts to portray herself as someone who is both idealistic and pragmatic in her views here by orienting to conflicting *positions*. Within this conflict, therefore, Bernice challenges the dominant motherhood discourses. In relation to other participants, only Vera expresses a similar sentiment. Although Bernice seems to be largely challenging the dominant discourses, her portrayal of self when she evaluates her motherhood practices is more ambivalent. She states that she is:

> …not judgemental one definitely, already, yea, I have that…. Balancing I'm still working on it lah.... He's still number one right now, he's still he will always be number one, but myself, I I am – what's the word – I am not taking care of myself as much as I should be lah.
>
> (*Bernice*, turns 530-534).

In the first part of the snippet above, Bernice constitutes herself congruently with her earlier definition by admitting that she does not judge other mothers (anymore). Here, Bernice constitutes herself as a 'good' mother based on her own definition of the term, challenging dominant motherhood discourses. The rest of the utterance which relates to "*balance*", however, witnesses Bernice admitting her incompatibility with her own definition, as she reports that her son is still her priority and that she disregards her own well-being. She, thus, simultaneously constitutes herself as not a 'good' mother by her own 'good' mother ideals, but a 'good' mother by the dominant motherhood standards. In this latter part of the utterance, Bernice moves to a *position* of *relative powerlessness* in her description of her incapacity to live up to her own motherhood ideals.

In comparison to Post 4.4 in which Bernice discusses her choice to leave her infant to go to the cinema, Bernice portrays herself differently in the interviews. In the more private and conversational setting of our one-to-one interview, she is not as explicit in resisting the dominant 'good' mother discourses compared to her social media posts. Bernice is earnest in admitting that she is unable to attain her own motherhood ideals because she still prioritises her son, rather than herself (as depicted in Post 4.4). She also draws on intersecting and sometimes opposing themes. By analysing and understanding the way Bernice conceptualises the 'good' mother in Excerpt 4.8 earlier, Post 4.4 can be interpreted as a way of representing herself as a 'good' mother by her own definition, i.e. a mother who "*takes care of herself*" (turn 496) and not "*being a hundred percent there for the kid*" (turn 498). This is another example of the complementary role of both interview and social media data to understand the complexities of identity construction processes. In general, Bernice constructs her ''good' mother' views and identities in her interview by ambivalently and synchronically asserting herself well over the contradictory motherhood discourses. She displays her pragmatism and agency in her ability to adapt her motherhood ideals to various dominant discourses.

A snippet from Zara's interview below further exemplifies the prevalence of assertiveness and ambivalence in the construction of identities in *relation* to the dominant 'good' motherhood discourses and the idea of '*balance'*. In highlighting this idea, Zara similarly underscores that mothers need to perform their other roles besides realising their responsibilities towards their children:

> …you have to find the right balance between being selfless for your child and also holding yourself together as a woman, as a person because at the end of the day you're also a wife.
>
> (*Zara*, turn 1213).

The snippet offers insights into how Zara ambivalently draws on the discourse of 'balance' to assertively conform to (a mother needs to be selfless for the child) as well as challenge (a mother needs to be 'balanced' by addressing her other social roles) 'good' mother ideals.

In relation to Bernice's Facebook Post 4.4, in which she makes fun of the discrepancy between her own and society's expectations of the 'good' mother, there are instances where Zara seems to be constructing her identities in similar ways. As shown in the following excerpt, Zara utilises different discursive features when it comes to expressing her concept of 'balance' in motherhood:

Excerpt 4.9 (a): *Zara* ["A Martha Stewart episode"]

Turn	Speaker	Transcript
1145.	Z	I think aa, mothers, er based on myself especially, you wake up every morning, wanting to move mountains
1146.	R	(laughs)
1147.	Z	wanting to pick up the stars, and bring the best out of your children
1148.	R	Uh hmm
1149.	Z	giving the best the best meal, giving the most fun play time, and at the same time keeping the house clean
1150.	R	A'ah
1151.	Z	Want to get the laundry done, and then you want to get your hair brushed and look decent by the time your husband comes back
1152.	R	(laughs)
1153.	Z	Ok. That is what you see in a Martha Stewart episode.
1154.	R	(laughs)
1155.	Z	That's aint gonna happen, there are good days, exceptionally good days, like the universe are all aligned to help you

The utterances in Excerpt 4.9 (a) show Zara's response to a question about motherhood trends. She highlights that new mothers should not be stressed with society's expectations, realised through the use of hyperbolic and superlative forms and sarcasm. Her response closely relates to her concept of "*balance*" mentioned in the snippet (turn 1213) earlier. *Denotatively*, Zara uses a number of exaggerated and hyperbolic expressions such as "*wanting to move mountains*" (turn 1145), "*wanting to pick up the stars*" (turn 1147) and "*like the universe are all aligned to help you*" (turn 1155) to express her views about the typical expectations of new mothers, including her own beliefs. The pronoun "*you*" in turn 1155 refers to herself as well as all mothers in general. The reflexive pronoun "*myself*" in turn 1145, on the other hand, refers to her 'old' self when she first became a mother, not her current self at the moment of the interview. She also uses superlative forms such as the twice-repeated superlative adjective "*best*" (turns 1147 and 1149), the superlative adverb of degree "*most*" (turn 1149), and the superlative adverb of manner "*exceptionally*" (turn 1155). In relation to her snippet earlier, Zara similarly mentions aspects of a mother's life other than 'mothering', which are "*keeping the house clean*" (turn 1149) as well as getting "*the laundry done*" (turn 1151) and "*hair brushed and look decent*" (turn 1151) for the husband. It is in turn 1153 when Zara links these elements of a new mother's expectations with "*Martha Stewart*" (turn 1153), a popular White American television celebrity who promotes domestic perfection (Tucker, 2013). Here her sarcastic response to these expectations is apparent. This *position* is further strengthened when she later expressly mentions "*That ain't gonna happen*" (turn 1155), reinforcing the assertive tone of her utterances in this excerpt.

Connotatively, Zara uses such hyperbolic and superlative expressions to make fun of the discrepancy between a new mother's actual experience and society's dominant expectations of the 'good' mother. Unlike Bernice, who does not mention anyone else in Post 4.4, Zara uses these discursive features to mock and *delegitimise* the dominant motherhood discourses which are aligned with her own previous (and other new mothers') typically unrealistic expectations of what it means to be 'balanced'. It is noticed that she does not include aspects that relate to the mother's own well-being in her mockery, despite mentioning the importance of this aspect in her snippet earlier. This absence, along with other discursive features used, shows Zara's acknowledgement that the normative discourses limit mothers' identities to the

confines of domestic tasks ("*cooking and cleaning*" (turn 1149)). In constructing her identities as a mother in this way, she *positions* herself in *contrast* to all new mothers in general, to her past mother identity (who used to believe in such unrealistic expectations), as well as specifically to a culturally different community of American celebrities who are typically depicted as 'perfect' mothers. The reference made to the celebrity, therefore, seems to *index* Zara's *position* as a mother who rejects the dominant motherhood discourses that are pervasively and *unrealistically* depicted in the media. Overall, Zara constructs her past self as conforming and thus *relatively powerless* against dominant motherhood expectations. However, she constructs her current self as more informed and experienced, and thus as *relatively authorised* to share the 'realities' of motherhood experiences*, positioning* herself as *relatively more powerful* in *relation* to other less experienced mothers. With regard to Zara's snippet earlier, the discursive elements analysed in Excerpt 4.9 (a) *connote* Zara's acknowledgement that in actuality, it is challenging even for herself to "*find the right balance*".

In the ten subsequent turns that are omitted from Excerpt 4.9 (a), Zara begins to express her actual views about the 'reality' of motherhood based on her own mothering experiences. She narrates the difficulties she faced in early motherhood to live up to the unrealistic expectation of being 'balanced' and then states that:

Excerpt 4.9 (b): *Zara* [Living "in the moment"]

Turn	Speaker	Transcript
1167.	Z	So it was very overwhelming and then until one point I figured out like whatever,
1168.	R	(laughs)
1169.	Z	I just enjoy that moment.
1170.	R	Ha ah
1171.	Z	If that moment my child wants to play, okay, let's play it's ok. And when you have played enough until you're tired and you wanna sleep okay let's get you nap.
1172.	R	Mm hmm
1173.	Z	And then after that we'll figure out because macam ok if it's me, macam since young my mum is a routine person, organised person so
1174.	R	Haa
1175.	Z	In somehow I get this idea of ah having a fixed routine
1176.	R	Ahh
1177.	Z	But your toddler won't give a damn to any routine
1178.	R	(laughs)
1179.	Z	So it took me a while to figure out like to to get used to the vibe of my my toddler...because I'm an organised person like I have to have breakfast in the morning, lunch time is lunch time, er dinner macam by 9 tu I macam dah er dah lambat dah ni nak dinner so macam *[....er dinner like by 9 that I like already er this is already late for dinner so like]*
1180.	R	Aaa
1181.	Z	when you become a mother, uhh, to hell all those routine
1182.	R	(laughs) Yea la
1183.	Z	But er you have to make it...just macam live in the moment kot. *[.....just like live in the moment maybe.]*

The tone at the beginning of the excerpt is negative as Zara explains that living up to unrealistic expectations is "*very overwhelming*" (turn 1167). At the end of the same turn, however, she shares a rather opposing sentiment towards motherhood challenges, signalled by the expression "*whatever*" which carries a tone of indifference. In turn 1171, Zara continues with her more relaxed attitude towards the uncertainties of mothering. From turn 1177 onwards, she assertively highlights the striking difference between her life before and after becoming a mother as she states "*to hell all those routine*" (turn 1181) as her toddler "*won't give a damn to any routine*" (turn 1177). These two utterances highlight Zara's use of profane words ("*damn*" and "*hell*") which add strength and emotive tones to her narrative.

Connotatively, at the beginning of the excerpt, Zara can be seen to be navigating her identity from the *position* of a new idealistic mother who views motherhood challenges in a negative light to the *position* of a mother who is more positive and

pragmatic. As well as signalling her detachment from her past identities, her mobilised identities can also be deciphered as her way of redefining what it means to be 'balanced', i.e. by living/enjoying "*the moment*" one has with her child(ren). In other words, Zara could be *positioning* her current self as a truly 'balanced' and 'good' mother. Throughout the excerpt, Zara seems to frame who she is as a mother in *opposition* to her child by drawing on the less prevalent 'me versus the child' theme, which is especially *indexed* in the emotionally-charged profane words used. The theme of 'me versus the child' is not commonly found in other participants' data; those who do utilise it are Bernice and Vera. In addition, it is noticed that Zara draws on her past *opposing* identity as a non-mother, i.e. an organised person, and this reference to a past self is rather common among other participants as well. Zara, however, often does this in *relation* to the *opposing* mothering approach taken by her own mother, to highlight the significant challenges she faces in coming to terms with her toddler's erratic daily schedule. In her interview, Zara is often seen to be describing who she is as a mother in *contrast* to her own mother and confidently attributes her *different* mothering beliefs, decisions and challenges in *contrast* to the opposing ways she was raised by her mother and their complicated relationship. In terms of power relations, Zara is ambivalently portraying herself as both *powerful* (for her decision to "*live in the moment*") as well as *powerless* (for being subjected to her toddler's unpredictable daily routine). Evidently, in ambivalently constructing her 'good' mother identities in Excepts 4.9 (a) and (b), Zara has drawn on numerous overlapping and interrelated themes.

4.5 Conclusion

I shall begin drawing conclusions based on the analysis of findings in this chapter by first addressing RQ1, and later RQ2:

1. What identities do the participants construct in interviews and on social media?

Overall, the participants whose excerpts are analysed in this chapter seem to be orienting closely to the general identity of a mother, regardless of the ways they respond to the dominant motherhood discourses. Detailed analysis has revealed that many participants are inclined to explicitly and/or implicitly describe themselves based on evaluative aspects of being a mother, i.e. as 'good', 'better', not 'good'

enough, or even 'bad' mothers. In relation to these evaluative aspects of identity construction, many of the participants are found to be constructing multiple overlapping and contradictory identities. Certain identities constructed by the participants are also related to the participants' sense of agency. All in all, the participants whose excerpts are selected in this chapter are representative of the majority of the participants, who construct various evaluative identities related to the role of a mother regardless of their demographic backgrounds, the textual platforms used or the ways they *position* themselves in *relation* to the dominant discourses.

2. How are these identities constructed and negotiated in interviews and on social media?

In relation to this second research question, the headings and sub-headings of this chapter have provided the gist of the main ways the participants construct and negotiate their identities, i.e. that the participants construct their 'good' mother identities in interviews and on social media by *positioning* themselves as conforming to, challenging and/or ambivalently responding to the dominant motherhood discourses, in both their reported views and practices. However, the detailed analyses have also provided evidence that discursive processes of identity construction are far more intricate than these seemingly well-defined sections may suggest. Contrary to my own assumptions, for instance, participants who conform to dominant discourses are not found to necessarily portray themselves as 'good' mothers, and vice versa. Also, even the 'normative' processes of constructing identities by conforming to the dominant motherhood discourses are found to be complex. The use of the different sociolinguistic principles (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) alongside the relations of power suggested by FPDA (Baxter, 2007) have also enabled the unpacking of some implicit relations of power inherent in the ways the participants construct *relatively powerful and/or powerless positions* in *relation* to the various discourses of motherhood (Baxter, 2007; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

The *denotative-connotative* levels of textual analysis (Baxter, 2007) have also shown that the processes of constructing identities cannot be understood by merely looking at either the 'micro' *denotative* interpretation of the data or just the 'macro' *connotative* interpretations of the data. Rather, these levels work together to provide

more insightful and multifaceted understandings of the complex processes. Through the analytical framework, the participants are also found to negotiate their 'good' mother identities by congruently and/or incongruently portraying their own reported 'good' mother ideals and practices. The participants have evidently not just aspired to be certain types of 'good' mothers but create their own definitions of the term in and through their various ways of responding to the dominant discourses. Most participants also do not just draw on one single discourse when portraying themselves. Most of the time, they negotiate their identities by combining, reinforcing, challenging and subverting multiple intersecting and sometimes opposing dominant and 'unconventional' intertextualised discourses related to the 'good' mother.

Another salient observation of the ways the participants construct their 'good' mother identities is how they portray themselves by *relating* to other identities within and/or beyond themselves across time in both types of data. In terms of textual platforms, some participants show congruent portrayals of self in both interview and social media data whilst some others represent themselves rather contradictorily in the different data sources. This observation reveals the intricate complexities of the discursive constructions of identities which participants articulate within each mode and across the two different modes of communication, both of which also depend on the levels of privacy and target 'audience'. This observation highlights the salience of intertextuality and 'temporality' in the intersubjective processes of constructing identities, an aspect not mentioned explicitly in any of the concepts within the analytical framework used in this study. These salient aspects shall be discussed later in Chapter 7.

Chapter 5: Analysis (II) – Navigating 'Good' Motherhood Discourses in Relation to Career Decisions

5.1 Introduction

As elucidated in the first three chapters, many Malaysian mothers often highlight the significance of their career choices when expressing their motherhood beliefs and experiences (Indramalar, 2017; Irwan Nadzif & Nor Azaian, 2011; Tang, 2017). This is mainly due to the increasing number of Malaysian mothers in the workforce (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2018), which has challenged traditional gendered understandings of 'good' motherhood (Arendell, 1999; Hays, 1996). In terms of identity construction, a consideration of such a socioeconomic context of motherhood in Malaysia can potentially offer insights into the intersecting discourses through which the participants construct their overlapping identities. To relate career relations to gender, sociolinguistic research in the past few decades that has been transforming the views of gender has focused on institutions like the workplace and media (Connell, 1991). In the current study, the participants are found to often draw on their career decisions as exemplifications and justifications for their 'good' mothering opinions and reported practices.

In this chapter, I will continue to explore the various ways the participants construct their identities, specifically in relation to their career decisions. This chapter will address the following research questions:

1a. What identities do the participants construct when they communicate about motherhood in relation to their career decisions in Malaysia?

2a. How do the participants construct and negotiate their identities within the intersecting discourses of motherhood and career decisions in Malaysia?

I will, therefore, unpack the processes of identity construction among the participants by first analysing different excerpts that exemplify the ways they navigate the intersecting discourses of motherhood and career decisions. The chapter will then proceed with a detailed analysis considering how participants explicitly orient to and negotiate the discourses of the three career-role categories of Malaysian mothers, namely stay-at-home, work-at-home and working mothers (SAHMs, WAHMs, WMs,

respectively). This section will also justify the selection of participants with regard to their career decisions. The chapter will conclude by summarising the complex ways the participants negotiate the intersecting and contradictory discourses of 'good' motherhood and career decisions in Malaysia. As before, the data analysis in this chapter will be once again guided by the combined analytical framework of Feminist Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis (FPDA) (Baxter, 2007), sociocultural principles of identity construction derived from Bucholtz and Hall (2005), and hegemonic femininities (Schippers, 2007).

The following table presents information from the interview data that has been coded to the major theme of 'relations to career' and its sub-themes (see Table 4.1 and Appendix 3). The information is organised according to frequency, along with some relevant snippets that intersect with the salient sub-theme of the 'good' mother, as generated from NVivo. Similar to Chapter 4, the snippets are all presented in English.

Table 5.1: Coding information and snippets from interviews for the sub-themes related to the theme of 'relations to career'

Themes and sub-themes	**Number of times coded**	**Number of participants coded**	**Snippets from interviews inductively coded to the sub-themes and intersecting with the theme of the 'good' mother**
G: Relations to career	**791**	**19**	*"I think the the current trend is more uh set by uhh young working mothers… With uh, more exposure, uh reading, and of course, Internet, and you have all these support groups."* (Cathy, turn 865).
g01. Working (WM)	130	13	*"When I was teaching, a lot of my colleagues were striving to do … like I still have to cook I still have to clean bla but I still my work and… my husband still expects me to do everything."* (Yaya, turn 1112).
g02. Work-at-home (WAHM)	117	8	*"Sometimes we want to work because it's like a necessity also today right. But we can try lah. Work on your own."* (Nadia, turn 951).
g11. Changing career roles	94	15	*"I was like it's better if I don't become a stay-at-home mother, it'd would be better if I just work, possibly the child will be amazing as well right."* (Dyana, turn 508).
g03. Stay-at-home (SAHM)	90	12	*"Even though like I am not a perfect mom who cooks everyday ….*

			something I know at least (I am) aware la of (my kids') sickness." (Dyana, turn 574).
g13. Career roles-beliefs-'good' mother	86	17	*"Those who are mothers these days especially those who are working, their awareness is higher maybe."* (Jasmin, turn 2409).
g10. Career-choice judgments	79	14	*"I mean some people see that oh it was a good decision that you, you make a good mother, because you make the good decision to quit. But some people don't agree."* (Sarah, turn 3223).
g05. Child(ren) and work decisions	48	13	*"If I don't take care of my children, who is going to take care of them right? My responsibility right. So I decided ... I('m) just gonna stay at home lah."* (Sarah, turn 828).
g06. Effects of work on mothering	36	12	*"Sometimes when uh uh my son asks for attention and I had to ask him to wait, or distract him, by giving him to do something else, so that I can do my work, yeah. So that was tough (laughs)."* (Cathy, turn 550).
g07. Work for money	25	8	*"When (chuckle) (my) business has become stable a bit now, there's a bit of money to bring them for activities."* (Sarah, turn 3277).
g04. Student (SM)	20	5	N/A
g08. Happiness as a SAHM	18	6	N/A
g09. Challenges of a SAHM	13	4	*"When you work you have a boss or superior yang tell you (unintelligible words) good job er or you're not doing good enough so there's always feedbacks when you're working."* (Zara, turn 1381).
g14. 'Mommy battle'	9	3	*"It's just sincerity I mean urmmm because ... cannot say full-times are better, stay-at-home moms are better, because there's ongoing sort of battle."* (Zara, turn 673).
g12. Acknowledging other mothers' challenges	9	6	N/A

As shown in Table 5.1, all nineteen participants did mention their career decisions when talking about 'good' mothering, though they orient to the issue in different ways, as reflected in the varied sub-themes. Likewise, such portrayals of self are also prevalent in the social media data. The following table presents quantitative information regarding the number of Facebook and Instagram posts coded to the major theme of 'relations to career', along with some snippets:

Table 5.2: Coding information and snippets from social media posts that are coded to 'relations to career' and relate to the ''good' mother'

Facebook/ Instagram	Number of times coded	Snippets from the captions of social media posts
Facebook	210	*"**** selalu tanya "apa je awk buat harini?" Lain kali nak jwb* *camni la "I kept a tiny little human alive today, clean, happy and fed". It's a tough job I tell u* 😂 *"* Translation: *"**** (my husband) often asks "what is it that you have done today?" Next time (I) want to answer like this la ""I kept a tiny little human alive today, clean, happy and fed". It's a tough job I tell u* 😂 *"* [accompanied by a related image with the same message of "my baby is clean, fed and happy", originally posted on another public Facebook page] (Qisya, FB_C7_61)
Instagram	65	*"9 days off (work). It's bonding time* 😘" [accompanied by a personal image of herself (with a smile) and her daughter in a car seat in the back of a car] (Eva, IG_A6_192)
Total	**275**	-

Table 5.2 shows that there are more Facebook posts coded to the major theme of 'relations to career', which as explained in Chapter 4, may be attributed to the more public nature of Facebook and the relative simplicity of sharing posts from external sources compared to Instagram (see Table 4.2). Table 5.2 also provides two snippets from social media post captions coded to the intersecting themes of 'relations to career' and the 'good' mother, with one snippet from each social media platform. The information from the coding processes helped select relevant data excerpts for further analysis in the ensuing sections. Similar to the overview of data presented above, the data selected for detailed analysis exemplify the intersections between the themes of 'relations to career' and the ''good' mother'.

5.2 Navigating the intersecting discourses of motherhood and career decisions

"I did not want to underperform as a mother….but at the same time, I didn't want to underperform as an employee."

(*Lippy Morgan*, turns 322-324)

In this section, I analyse three main excerpts and one social media post that exemplify the ways the participants construct their identities by navigating the complex intersecting discourses of ''good' motherhood' and career decisions. The first set of excerpts to be analysed come from an interview with Ain, whose ideas about 'good' motherhood are closely connected to different aspects of her past, current and future career decisions. At the beginning of the interview, Ain identified herself as a WAHM, but in the interview she revealed that, at times, she did assume the role of SAHM after quitting her job as a primary school teacher. Preceding the following conversation, Ain explained that "*a good mother is the one who is trying to be the best*" (turn 803). When asked to clarify what the term "*best*" meant for her, she responded as follows:

Excerpt 5.1 (a): *Ain* ["Doing the right thing at the right time"]

Turn	Speaker	Transcript
811.	A	Hmm for me, is to do the right thing at the right time and that is to be with them when they are still young
812.	R	Haa ok
813.	A	And because some of my friend I cakap diorang nak jaga tapi taknak masa kecik *[…my friends said they want to take care (of their children) but they don't want (to do so) when (the children are) small.]*
814.	R	Aaa
815.	A	They they they want to be at home with the kids when the kids are older
816.	R	Aaa
817.	A	But ar but of course that's your opinion I respect that
818.	R	Ha ah
819.	A	(laughs) Because it's very hard lah untuk make people think that macam the best time is when the kids are still below five or seven. *[…hard lah to make people think that like the best…].* (5 turns omitted)
825.	A	And because that that was shaped by my erm by my readings jugak la *[…my readings also la].*
826.	R	Readings?
827.	A	Ikut university US eh. *[Following US universities eh].*
828.	R	Ha ah
829.	A	Because cikgu sekolah rendah kan (laughs) *[Because primary school teacher right* (laughs)]

At the *denotative* level (Baxter, 2007), Ain employs various discursive features such as the use of pronouns, noun phrases and conditional structures in both Excerpts 5.1(a) and Excerpt 5.1 (b) to underscore her strong identification both as a WAHM and as a SAHM. In substantiating her opinion that trying to be the "best" is *"to be with them* (children) *when they are still young"* (turn 811), Ain's shifting use of pronouns is apparent. Ain consistently uses the third-person plural pronoun "*they*" to specifically refer to her fellow WM friends who have opposing views about childcare (turns 813 to 815). Her use of pronouns then changes to the more generic second-person plural pronoun "*your*" in turn 817 and the general noun "*people*" in turn 819. To better understand Ain's reference here, it is important to note that Ain mentioned earlier in the interview that her working in-laws often judged her mothering practices based on the fact that she was a SAHM. The pronouns and nouns, thus, *denote* her reference to working mothers in general. This meaning can be inferred from many utterances she expressed earlier in the interview, for example:

> Macam because the thing I do now macam memang bukan yang most what normal people do kan?
> *[Like because the thing I do now like indeed not what most normal people do right?]"*
>
> (*Ain*, turn 625).

The clause "*the thing I do now*" refers to her state of not working and taking full-time childcare responsibility at home, and the phrase "*normal people*" refers to WMs. In turns 825 to 827 in Excerpt 5.1(a), Ain explicitly validates her opinions, with some laughter, of motherhood by *relating* them to her readings which are in line with "*US universities*" and her own past career role as a primary school teacher. In the following utterances in Excerpt 5.1(b), Ain continues to express similar sentiments with reference to her future career prospects:

Excerpt 5.1 (b): *Ain* ["You cannot do much you cannot ask much"]

Turn	Speaker	Transcript
831.	A	Because I see a lot of things you can actually do only when they are seven and below, and after that they are independent
832.	R	(unintelligible words)
833.	A	You you can play and you can ask them but that is their decision after that you cannot do much you cannot ask much.. and I said if I (off topic) And yes and after seven years old I think kalau if I e- ever feel like working again, then I will consider *[…I think if if I e-ever…]*
834.	R	Aaa
835.	A	Tu kalau takde anak-anak kecik dah la (laughs) *[That is if there are no more small children la* (laughs)]
836.	R	(laughs) (unintelligible words) bertambah (unintelligible words) *[….increasing…]*
837.	A	But but then pun kalau ada orang sudi terima kita la eh, sebab kita dah lama tak tak dalam service kan? *[But but then only if there are people who are willing to accept us la eh, because we have been long absent from the service right?]*
838.	R	Ha ah
839.	A	So I only ask their first seven years, but at least 6 years la sebelum dia pegi sekolah *[…but at least 6 years la before he/she starts going to school].*
840.	R	Ha ah
841.	A	And that's all

Denotatively, Ain elaborates upon her earlier arguments by repeatedly using the adverb "*only*" (turn 831 and 839). This reference to her future career possibilities is mostly structured in conditional terms, one after another. The word "orang *[people]*" in turn 837 refers to future employers and is followed by her collective concern that "*kita [we]*" have been out of the workforce for a long period of time (referring to herself and other mothers).

Connotatively (Baxter, 2007), throughout Excerpt 5.1(a) and Excerpt 5.1(b), the discursive features reveal Ain's close and consistent orientation to the arguably 'better' role of either a WAHM or a SAHM. In justifying such an opinion, Ain's choice of increasingly distant and generic pronouns in Excerpt 5.1(a) *indexes* her *contrastive positioning* of herself in *relation* to those mothers who choose to work outside the home (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). The level of abstraction created from such a use of plural features also signifies her arguably 'lonely' struggle as a minority figure trying to convince the majority of WMs that they are not doing "*the right thing at the right time*" like herself. The only time Ain uses the collective pronoun is in Excerpt 5.1(b), which further confirms Ain's strong sense of belonging in *relation* to the minority group identity of WAHMs and/or SAHMs and the dilemma collectively shared by this

group. Ain's *contrastive positioning* of identities in this way is inferred from the wider contextual clues which run throughout in her entire interview, since Ain does not once expressly mention 'working mothers' in these excerpts. Ain's strong yet implicit allusion to her 'better' *position* as a WAHM and/or SAHM possibly emerges because of her awareness of our shared past identity as overseas TESOL-qualified educators (Ain was my junior in the same TESOL twinning undergraduate programme with overseas universities), and yet our career-related *positions* emerged as *different* after about eight years (Baxter, 2007; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

Interestingly, from the standpoint of hegemonic femininities (Schippers, 2007), Ain is also seen to support her own individual, 'good' mothering ideas with *global* justifications for not working. This is evident in her reference to her reading of research carried out by academic institutions beyond the *regional* level of Malaysia, and through her mention of her past work experience as a primary school teacher. By implicitly *positioning* herself as a well-informed WAHM and/or SAHM who is exposed to ideas beyond the confines of her household (i.e. in the wider workplace and arguably *global* academic settings), Ain is reclaiming her agency over her currently 'less normal' career decision. In this way, Ain adopts a counter discursive *position* in *relation* to the career-related motherhood decisions she perceives as hegemonic at the *local* (small communities of WMs around her) and *regional* (Malaysian mothers) levels (Schippers, 2007). This *position authorises* her career decision and *delegitimises* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) other WMs' preferences. These discursive features also *connote* her assertion that mothers who decide to take on main child-raising responsibilities at home are *relatively* 'superior' mothers, thus reinforcing the *global* hegemonic discourses of motherhood which often place women as the main parent in domestic settings, yet subordinate to the breadwinner role of men. This is a common observation across the SAHM participants (except for Vera).

When it comes to her future career prospects, however, Ain's repeated conditional statements disclose her strong sense of reservation. Although one could claim that Ain is agentive because she would only consider working "*if she feels like it*", I would argue that Ain actually constructs a *position* of *relative powerlessness*. The conditional circumstances indicate her helplessness, because she makes it clear that even when she actually needed or wanted to work in the future, she would be most likely unable

to work anyway (see turn 837). This reflects the career-related dilemma amongst SAHMs in that the relatively short-term decision to leave the workforce to bring up children may persist indefinitely. Despite such a realisation, Ain's reassertion of her need to take care of her children before they start school could be her way of reclaiming agency on her own terms at this current, arguably limited, period of time. Overall, in Excerpts 5.1(a) and (b), Ain negotiates the contradictory dominant motherhood discourses at varying levels: *local* (her close community of mostly WMs), *regional* (educated Malaysian mothers who are mostly working) and *global* (the normative child-raising role of a mother worldwide). She also *positions* herself at opposing ends of the *powerfulness-powerlessness* (Baxter, 2007) continuum at different times.

The intersection of the themes of ''good' motherhood', 'career' and 'challenges' is also evident among other participants who are SAHMs. Dyana, for example, has constructed herself as a homemaker ever since becoming a mother. What is unique about her utterances in the following excerpt (5.2) is the fact that she situates her mothering challenges in terms of career mostly within the community of SAHMs, but highlights their generational differences. Preceding the following responses, Dyana expressed that one of the things she was judged for as a mother was when people pointed out her son's speech delay and they linked it to her role as a SAHM. She stated that:

Excerpt 5.2: *Dyana* ["Everything is our fault"]

Turn	Speaker	Transcript
743.	D	… Tapi diaorang macam "eh, kenape kenape ni? Pasal ko tak antar pegi (nursery) ni." Haah aihhh semue kan salah kite la (unintelligible). "Ko kan tak keje, macam jage die kan? Tak banyak cakap ngan die eh tak?" Haaa macam everything is our fault tau (sighs) macam bile I cakap dengan die, I tak pernah pon cakap pelat ke ape. I really talk to him, memang tak nak cakap. Gile semue salah I. "Pasal, kau yang ade 24 hours dengan die, kenape die tak reti cakap? So it's your fault. (unintelligible). Ohh ni je tak hantar pegi nursery, tu sebab die jarang jumpe orang jadi die jarang ber- die jarang talk bercakap." So habis tu mak die ni cakap bahase apa, kan? *[… But they are like "eh, why why this? Because you do not send him to (nursery) this." Haah aihhh all right our fault la (unintelligible). "You are not working, right, like take care of him right? (You) do not talk much with him eh no?" Haaa like everything is our fault ok (sighs). Like when I talk to him, I really never talk using baby language or what. I really talk to him, (he)*

		just does not want to talk. Crazy all my fault. "Because, you are with him for 24 hours, why is he not able to talk? So it's your fault (unintelligible). Ohh it's just (you) did not send (him) to nursery, that's why he rarely sees people so (he) becomes he rarely t- he rarely talks talks." So what language does his mother talk, right?]
744.	R	Ohh ha ah.
745.	D	Mase tu rase pressure especially from makcik makcik, aunties la *[At that time (I) feel pressured especially from aunties, aunties la.]*
-		(15 turns omitted).
761.	D	Ye ah rase ye, satu, satu yang perception yang general la, yang macam, mothers in general kan? Lagi satu pasal, tu la yang banyak tegur ni yang, dah veteran kan? Yang macam you cakap la sekarang lain, dulu lain kan? Tak tau lah dulu macam mane. Pasal, diorang pon macam mostly yang full time housewife kan? (unintelligible) macam (unintelligible) dulu tu diorang like, everything diorang boleh handle, eehhhh tak tau lah...kan...rase cam, (sighs) care diorang cakap tu macam it's like, macam kenape ah dulu aku, anak aku takde pon macam ni, macam (unintelligible) senang je. Umur, umur setahun dah tak kai Pampers. Eh dah tak pakai lampin dah, macam, perfectnye life kau camtu ah! (laughs) *[Yeah feel yeah, one, one the general perception la, which like, mothers in general right? One more about, that la that those who comment a lot actually are, already veteran right? Whom like you say la now different, then different right?(I) don't know lah how it was then. Because, they also like mostly are full time housewives right? (unintelligible) like (unintelligible) then they were like, like why ah in those days I, my child was never like this, like (unintelligible) very easy. At the age of one already not wearing Pampers. Eh already not wearing nappies, like how perfect is your life like that ah! (laughs).]*
762.	R	(laughs).
763.	D	(Unintelligible) rase macam, ape…high expectation atau mungkin diorang dah lame tak jage budak kecik kan? So diorang, diorang punye kesusahan dulu tu diorang dah lupe. Diorang nampak macam, ah tengok anak aku, berjaye je, senang je ni ni ni semue. Jadi macam judging la kat kite. Tapi seriously tak tau, beze dulu dengan sekarang. Ye ah dulu…dah la. I mean, mungkin tak sebanyak peer pressure sekarang kot (laughs). *[(Unintelligible) feel like, what…high expectation or maybe it has been long they have not taken care of small children right? So they, they have forgotten their difficulties then. They see like, ah look at my child, simply successful, simply easy this this this all. So like judging la on us. But seriously (they) don't know, the difference between then and now. Yeah ah then… that's it. I mean maybe not as much as current peer pressures maybe (laughs).]*

Denotatively, Dyana uses direct speech quotes, informal pronouns, rhetorical questions and highlights certain noun and temporal phrases to express her dissatisfaction about the judgments she receives. When quoting the judgments in turn 743, Dyana consistently uses the pronoun "*ko [you]",* the more casual yet arguably

rude form of the second-person pronoun in Malay to refer to herself here. Her use of rhetorical questions at the end of turn 743 highlights her sense of disbelief about people's judgments. In terms of the words she uses, the mentioning of "*nursery*" for example, *denotes* her implicit reference to the opposing situation faced by WMs whose children are sent to childcare centres when they go to work. In turn 745, Dyana explicitly states that the judgments actually come from "*makcik makcik [aunties]"* which, within the Malaysian context, refers to older women in general. Such a reference is strengthened when she emphasises the word "*veteran*". To refer to those "*aunties*", she consistently uses the informal third-person Malay pronoun "*diorang [they]*" (turn 761) which, in Malay, is rarely used to refer to older people in face-to-face conversations, especially in the presence of other older people for it may imply disrespect. This dismissive reference to older mothers is reinforced later in the excerpt with her repeated use of temporal expressions "*dulu [then]*" and "*sekarang [now]*". In the same turn, Dyana sarcastically clarifies that the "*aunties*" are actually older SAHMs themselves. Finally, she uses the phrase "*peer pressure*" to refer to current mothering pressures incited amongst mothers themselves to reiterate the heightened pressure faced by SAHMs.

Connotatively, many different themes appear to intersect in Dyana's utterances in Excerpt 5.2 such as those relating to 'judgments and views', 'challenges', 'careers' and 'change'. In terms of challenges, Dyana's use of erratic and informal pronouns signifies her way of highlighting her challenging *position* as a SAHM, *relatively* more intensely than Ain earlier. Dyana seems to be consistently and *contrastively positioning* herself against those who judge her. Unlike Ain, whose challenges *position* her as a member of an out-group, Dyana's use of discursive features *position* her as being challenged not only in terms of her membership of an in-group (i.e. *in relation* to fellow SAHMs), but also in terms of her membership of an out-group (i.e. *in relation* to older generations). When constructing her identities in *relation* to the in-group judgments, Dyana assumes a *position* of *powerlessness* as a SAHM because although she has done her best, she is still emotionally affected by the judgments, implicitly evaluating herself as a less 'good' mother. This happens despite her repetition throughout the interview that she is happy to be a SAHM. As a member of an out-group, on the other hand, Dyana is quick to adopt a *position* of *relative powerfulness* when she *delegitimises* the older generation of SAHMs whose opinions

she regards as less valid for their lack of understanding of the present pressures experienced by younger SAHMs. In a related vein, Dyana's reference to peer pressure links to the current use of social media by mothers. In general, Dyana portrays herself in a *position* of *relative powerfulness* as an out-group member within the discourse of 'generational differences' and in a *position* of *relative powerlessness* as an in-group member within the specific discourse of SAHMs. This reveals the strong impact her career decision has had on the ways she portrays and evaluates herself as a mother.

We can better understand Dyana's construction of herself in the excerpt by trying to scrutinise what she implicitly *positions* as the 'hegemonic' discourse of motherhood in *relation* to her career decisions. There are two types of discourse that Dyana draws on here. First, as a SAHM, Dyana seems to *position* herself as a 'minority' in *contrast* to the increasingly 'common' and hegemonic *local* and *regional* discourse of WMs in Malaysia who send their children to childcare centres. Such a practice is believed by some to produce more articulate and sociable children who have more opportunities to communicate (Harris, 2016). Dyana also *positions* herself as *delegitimised* by the wider and arguably *global* hegemonic discourse of motherhood. According to this discourse, a SAHM is expected to be the 'more capable' mother and produce 'better' children than other types of mothers who do not fully care for their children (Hays, 1996). Dyana thus seems to be consistently 'trapped' in different *positions* of *powerlessness* in both 'types' of career-related discourses. She constructs her career-related challenges of motherhood so intensely, possibly in order to represent the voices of SAHMs who have to navigate and evaluate themselves according to contradictory motherhood discourses such as these. Such a construction of identities reflects the typical evaluation of 'good' parenting based on the 'performance' of female parents within domestic settings. This evaluation transcends *different* generations and career decisions, and is evident among many other participants regardless of their career roles.

The excerpts analysed below come from Lippy Morgan's interview, revealing her strong orientation to her career role. She discusses her positive and negative experiences of motherhood from the perspective of a WM. In terms of her career, Lippy Morgan worked as a banker after graduating from an accounting degree programme. Lippy Morgan clarified during the interview that she and her husband made a conscious decision to have their first child four years after their marriage. After

prompting her to share her positive experiences of motherhood, she detailed the immense amount of love she has for her son:

Excerpt 5.3(a): *Lippy Morgan* ["I make it look glamourous"]

Turn	Speaker	Transcript
84.	LM	He brings so much joy in the sense that our work can be quite str stressful kan [*right*]?
85.	R	Yes.
86.	LM	But when you see your child, everything melts away kan [*right*]?
87.	R	(laughs) Ha ah.
88.	LM	That's the best part about being motherhood. I think the challenge would be I would say to er to manage the role as a career woman
89.	R	Yes.
90.	LM	and also as a mother, because I make it very clear with my husband and also to my parents that when I become a mother, I don't want to short-change my son.
91.	R	Ahh.
92.	LM	Short-change meaning to say that he shouldn't be getting something below than what he deserves
93.	R	Ahh.
94.	LM	in terms of having a mother.
95.	R	Ok
96.	LM	So it is very very tough. Tougher than what you see in Facebook, tougher than what you see in Instagram.
97.	R	(laughs) I know (laughs).
98.	LM	I make it look glamorous, but it's not.
99.	R	(laughs).
100.	LM	You know, you have two kids.
101.	R	Yeah.
102.	LM	It is not glamorous at all. It is extremely tired. Err lack of sleep. But it needs to be done.

Denotatively, Lippy Morgan's use of rhetorical questions and plural pronouns as well as explicit references to the challenges of motherhood and the illusion of social media underscores her dilemma as a WM. Lippy Morgan begins by linking the joy of having her child specifically with the opposing stress she experiences in her career. The utterances are constructed through rhetorical questions and reveal the use of the first-person plural pronoun "*our*" (turn 84) and the second-person plural pronouns "*you*" and "*your*" (turn 86). These plural pronouns do not only reveal Lippy Morgan's attempt to elicit a response from me as a listener but also reveal her reference to: (i) herself; (ii) me, whom she knows shares the identity of a WM (when I was in Malaysia); and (iii) WMs in general. Interestingly, she then mentions the "*challenge*" of motherhood, despite responding to a question about her 'positive' mothering experiences. She continues to reiterate the challenge of being a WM and contrast this

with her opposing depictions of motherhood on Facebook and Instagram. She admits that she makes mothering look "*glamourous*" on her social media platforms and then repeatedly asserts that, in reality, it is not. In between, she also adds "*you know, you have two kids*" (turn 100), directed towards me as the researcher.

Between Excerpt 5.3(a) and Excerpt 5.3(b), Lippy Morgan elaborates the challenges she faces in motherhood in terms of her career, labour experiences and her excessive protectiveness towards her son. She then more explicitly sets out the difficulties in managing her schedule as a WM which elaborates on the dilemma expressed in Excerpt 5.3(a):

Excerpt 5.3(b): *Lippy Morgan* [Short-changing my son]

Turn	Speaker	Transcript
322.	LM	… erm I think my biggest challenge was that I wanted to make sure that I did not want to underperform as a mother, right? because that's what he deserves, a good mother.
323.	R	Yeah.
324.	LM	But at the same time, I didn't want to underperform as an employee.
325.	R	Ha ah.
326.	LM	Reason being is because when I first moved to my current job now, 4 months after moving I got pregnant.
327.	R	(laughs).
328.	LM	So this was the company that pinched me from my previous job,
329.	R	A ah.
330.	LM	Thinking that "ok you know she's good, I bring her in. And then sh turns out that she's pregnant".
331.	R	Ok.
332.	LM	Which means pregnant equals to maternity leave.
333.	R	Ohhh.
334.	LM	Long maternity leave.
335.	R	They don't like long materli (unintelligible words) don't like it.
336.	LM	It's just an issue of short of staff, right? and and and whatnot. So I was at under pressure to say that, "look, you know your judgment on me was not wrong when you hire me. It's just that because of God's grace that I am pregnant and I have to give birth, but I will not short-change what I owe you as an employee".

Here, Lippy Morgan reiterates her earlier concern as a WM through the continued use of rhetorical questions and direct speech quotes, but this time with an explicit reference to the "*good mother*" (turn 322). In this excerpt, she mentions her desire not to "*underperform*", both as a mother and an employee. Lippy Morgan then narrates the immense pressure she faces to prove to her current company that their initial judgment of her was valid. In this short story, Lippy Morgan's use of pronouns is erratic. From

using the general phrase "*the company*" (turn 328), she switches to "*I*" (turn 330), narrating the story from the company's point of view and using "*she*" (turn 330) to refer to herself. In turn 336, she then explains that the problem is "*just*" an issue of "*short of staff*" in a rhetorical question which is immediately followed by some hesitation. At the end of the excerpt, Lippy Morgan shifts to narrating from her own point of view but in a manner which mimics her direct conversation with her employer.

Connotatively, Lippy Morgan *positions* herself assertively in the role of a WM through the dilemma of being both a 'good' mother and a 'good' employee. She describes her career as contributing intensely both to her happiness and challenges. By using impersonal pronouns as well as her frequent use of rhetorical questions, Lippy Morgan *positions* herself in *relation* to the shared group identity of WMs. This is seen not just from her explicit reference to her career but also from her co-construction of identities with me as a researcher, because she knows I am also a working mother. Unlike Ain, Lippy Morgan's motherhood challenges are more internalised as she does not express her challenges in terms of relationships with others but rather in terms of her own personal aim for 'perfection'. The repeated use of negative verbs like "*short-change*" and "*underperform*", along with other discursive features, *indexes* Lippy Morgan's portrayal of herself as a 'performer' in the contexts of both motherhood and her career. She seems 'trapped' in her desire to be perceived as an equally 'good' mother and employee. Her aspiration to be such a person renders her both as *powerful* (for setting the 'benchmark' for herself) and *powerless* (for having to deal with gendered *local* and *regional* expectations in both domestic and workplace settings typically experienced by female working parents). Despite Lippy Morgan's arguably *powerful* attempts at de-gendering workplace expectations (reflected in her empathetic rationalisation on behalf of her company in turn 336), her continual dilemma reflected in the use of the discursive features signifies underlying problems that are more than "*just*" a lack of staff. I would argue that the ways she conceives of her motherhood-related dilemma in terms of her own shortcomings actually reflect her own and other WMs' *positions* of *powerlessness* in relation to their need to 'over-perform' in both domestic and workplace settings to make up for their perceived limitations.

In addition, it is noted that Lippy Morgan's narratives in the two excerpts intersect with the themes of 'social media' and 'religion'. In describing the challenges of

motherhood, Lippy Morgan is frank in admitting that the persona she maintains on social media is misleading. In this way, it can be argued that she *positions* herself as *powerful* in her portrayal of herself as 'glamourous' to her social media followers, despite the fact that she *positions* herself as *powerless* in her discussion of the 'un-glamourous' 'realities' of motherhood. In terms of religion, when quoting "*God's grace*", Lippy Morgan can be said to *index* her identity as a Muslim. Such a construction of religious identity highlights the importance of religion in the ways some participants construct their ideas about and/or themselves as the 'good' mother. In this instance, she is seen to simultaneously assume *positions* of both *powerlessness* (for quoting God as her reason for being pregnant, i.e. a situation that is beyond her control) and *powerfulness* (for her choice to provide the best for her son and employer, regardless). When it comes to hegemonic discourses of motherhood in terms of her career, unlike Ain and Dyana, Lippy Morgan expresses her ideas exclusively in '*local'* terms within the WM group itself. Her utterances imply that a WM who can be 'good' in both motherhood and employment is 'better' within the *local* community of WMs. The challenges that she describes, however, still essentially draw on the *global* idea of 'good' motherhood, which expects unconditional prioritisation of children. This idea is present across the dataset.

Many of Lippy Morgan's Facebook posts also reveal the intersection between the themes of 'good' motherhood' and 'career decisions'. The following post is selected because it shows Lippy Morgan's explicit construction, both textually and visually, of her dilemma as a WM in relation to the earlier excerpts:

Post 5.1: *Lippy Morgan* [The "most important job"]

Denotatively, Lippy Morgan narrates her reflections on being a mother based on a two-week work-related visit to the United States. She recounts that her son would not let go of her for a while upon her arrival home from the trip. The picture was evidently taken by someone else at her house. In terms of her looks, Lippy Morgan is seen here donning casual home attire with her glasses on (she typically does not wear glasses outside the home). Lippy Morgan describes her son's feelings in the form of direct speech (marked by the double inverted commas). Her shifting use of tenses from past tense (in the narration and evaluation of herself) to present tense (when declaring the effects of the incident on her future arrangements for childcare) is also noticeable. It is noted that she relates the act of mothering to a "*job*" by describing it using superlatives like "*best*" and "*most*" in an exclamatory structure. At the end of the caption, she also adds the hashtags *#diaryofaworkingmom* and *#mysonmyworld* to

refer to her career *position* (which is not commonly found in other participants' social media data) and her priorities as a mother, respectively.

Connotatively, the caption, image and hashtags work together to convey Lippy Morgan's expression of regret, love and priorities as a WM. There are some *similarities* as well as *differences* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) between the ways Lippy Morgan constructs herself as a WM in the interview excerpts and in the Facebook post. On both communication platforms, she explicitly points out the dilemma of juggling her career and motherhood. In the ways she lists her priorities, however, the Facebook post shows a stronger orientation towards her *position* as a mother, rather than as a worker. Working motherhood is viewed more negatively but it is explicitly mentioned in one of the hashtags. Her hashtags provide evidence for Lippy Morgan's very explicit way of constructing her identities in *relation* to the career roles mentioned. There is a shift from *powerless* in the past (for having to leave her son and admitting her mistake in her evaluation of herself) to *powerful* in the present and future (by agentively 'vowing' not to commit the same 'mistake' again and highlighting her positive view of herself as a mother). Interestingly, this post does not depict motherhood as 'glamorous', as was suggested in Excerpt 5.3(b). This signifies Lippy Morgan's 'unglamourous' casual appearance, similar to her description of the reality of motherhood in the interview. Although Lippy Morgan's assertion in her interview (in August 2016) about her 'glamourous' social media posts contradicts what is seen in Post 5.1 (posted in April 2016), it can be argued that such an 'honest' portrayal of motherhood on social media reflects her conscious decision to convey that the reality of motherhood is indeed more challenging than what is publicly portrayed.

It must be noted that this post is very different in terms of content, discursive structures and tone from her social media posts while she was still in the United States. In those posts, she depicted her desire to not feel guilty for leaving her son because of work. The differences do not only reveal Lippy Morgan's dilemma in negotiating contradictory motherhood expectations across different temporal and spatial contexts in *relation* to her *position* as a WM, but also reveal a few other participants' career-related dilemma (e.g. Intan, Faz, Cathy and Bernice). All in all, despite Lippy Morgan's assertiveness about her mothering and career decisions, the ways she portrays herself as guilty (and avoiding guilt) reinforce the wider *global* hegemonic

discourse of motherhood: i.e. the ongoing gendered dilemma among female parents who are typically pressured to choose motherhood over their career in order to maintain the existing social order and harmony. This observation is evident among most of the participants.

5.3 Constructing and negotiating identities through the different categories of career roles

In the second half of this chapter, I will analyse four excerpts and three social media posts in which the participants construct their identities in relation to the discourses associated with the three main career roles among Malaysian mothers, namely SAHMs, WAHMs and WMs (Irwan Nadzif & Nor Azaian, 2011; Tang, 2017). These are the categories that I laid out earlier in Chapter 3 (see section 3.6). The data analysed in this section will reveal participants' more explicit orientation towards their current career decisions in *relation* to others'. I must reiterate, though, that acknowledging the constructions of these categories does not mean that I view this distinction as being absolute. The distinction is made for practical reasons, and it further supports the selection of participants according to the career-role categories as well as the relevance of this sub-section and chapter. The analysis will progress from data that show participants' construction of identities in relation to the competing discourses of SAHMs and WMs, to those that reveal the relatively more recent discourses of WAHMs and finally, to the data that challenge the distinction between the three career-role categories.

5.3.1 Caught between two extremes? – The competing discourses of SAHMs versus WMs

In this sub-section, two interview excerpts and one Facebook post will be analysed to uncover the participants' construction of their identities through explicit orientation to the discourses of SAHMs and WMs, which are often *positioned* at opposite ends of the 'career decision continuum'. The section will begin with an analysis of an excerpt from the interview with Intan, then an excerpt from Cathy's interview, and lastly, one Facebook post by Lippy Morgan.

For context, Intan used to be a WM in her first few months of motherhood but later left her job as a university lecturer in agreement with her husband. At the time of the interview, she had raised their three children, mostly as a SAHM. Preceding the following conversation in Excerpt 5.4, Intan expressed that a 'good' mother must be patient, knowledgeable and not allow excessive use of electronic devices. In terms of career decisions, she stated that SAHMs are usually more informed of their children's needs and thus can deal with them better. She nonetheless added a few 'disclaimers' that WMs can be 'good' too if they fully attend to the children when they are at home. Asked if her conception of a 'good' mother would be the same if she was still working, she responded as follows:

Excerpt 5.4: *Intan* [Distracting kids with gadgets]

Turn	Speaker	Transcript
771.	I	Aaa tapi kalau jadi a working mom maybe aaa benda tu yang berilmu tu perlu, perlu lah kan? *[Aaa but if become a working mom maybe aaa the thing on being knowledgeable is needed, needed lah right?]*
772.	R	Mmm.
773.	I	Mmm hmm aaa sabar tu perlu. Bila, bila balik kerja kita penat (laughs). *[Mmm hmm aaa being patient is needed. When, when returning home from work we (are) tired (laughs)]*
774.	R	(laughs).
775.	I	Ha memang kena sabar banyak lah kan? *[Ha indeed have to be patient a lot lah right?]*
776.	R	Haa.
777.	I	Emm tapi maybe I akan guna banyak gadget untuk anak kot nak menyenangkan kerja (laughs). *[Emm but maybe I will use a lot of gadgets for kids maybe to make things easier (laughs)]*
778.	R	Ha ouh dari segi tu lah? *[Ha ouh in that aspect lah?]*
779.	I	Ha sebab bila dah balik kerja, kan ada kerja lain yang nak kena buat. *[Ha because once we return home from work, there are other work to be done.]*
780.	R	Ouh a'ah.
781.	I	Aaa macam masak ke kemas ke aaa apa tu ataupun kadang-kadang kita bawa paper marking ke kan? *[Aaa like cooking or tidying up or aaa what's that or sometimes we bring back papers to mark or right?]*
782.	R	Mmm.
783.	I	Ha mesti lah rasanya akan guna gadget kot sebab my husband selalu outstation. So selalunya seorang je kat rumah kan? *[Ha surely lah probably (I) will use gadgets maybe because my husband is usually (working) outstation. So usually (I am) only alone at home right?]*
784.	R	Ouh ye ke? *[Ouh really?]*
785.	I	Ha'ah. So rasanya memang akan selalu guna distract kids aaa macam anak boleh sendiri ataupun bukak kan tv ke. *[Ha ah. So probably will indeed usually use to distract kids aaa like kids can (do things) on their own or swith on the TV or.]*

Denotatively, Intan uses elaborations, oxymoronic structures and rhetorical questions to display her positive orientation towards her role as a SAHM in *contrast* to WMs. In response to the initial question, Intan considers each of the three qualities she defines as constituting the 'good' mother one after another: knowledge, patience, and not allowing children's excessive use of electronic devices. When it comes to the third quality (turn 777), however, she elaborates in detail using oxymoronic structures: "*mesti lah rasanya [surely lah probably]*" (turn 783) and "*rasanya memang [probably will indeed]*" (turn 785). These refer to her decision to distract her children using

electronic devices to "*make things easier*" (turn 777) because she rationalises that if she were a WM, she would have both house- and work-related tasks to do. Some utterances (turns 771, 775, 781 and 783) are constructed as rhetorical questions to elicit some confirmation for her responses.

Connotatively, by stating that being a WM would cause her to adopt *opposing* qualities to those that she believes define a 'good' mother, she is implying that in certain aspects, her notion of 'good' motherhood is *relative* to her identity within her career. Unlike other SAHMs like Qisya, Intan indirectly conveys a positive orientation towards her current career role as a SAHM, which she suggests puts her in a *better position* to be a 'good' mother according to the three qualities she mentioned. Intan's use of oxymorons in her elaborations in turns 783 and 785 (as shown in the *denotative* analysis) indicates ambivalent levels of certainty with regards to the use of electronic devices to 'ease' her motherhood challenges, and these can be used to infer several possible interpretations. It may actually reflect the complex *position* Intan is in during the interview as a SAHM, a former WM, a person whose own mother is a WM and a person being interviewed by me – an individual she views as a WM. Constructing herself as a SAHM, she emphasises with a high level of certainty the *opposing* challenges WMs face. At the same time, she may have mitigated her responses to avoid implying that WMs are less 'good' mothers because WMs also refer to: her past self; her hypothetical self; her own mother; and the researcher. In relation to gendered roles, Intan's mention of her multiple responsibilities for handling domestic tasks like cooking and tidying along with a WM's work-related tasks not only reflects Intan's *position*, but also the general female parent's *position,* as the main parent in the family who is expected to perform most of the tasks related to childcare and housework. This reflects broader gendered discourses at *local*, *regional* and *global* levels, and is commonly found across the dataset. The male parent typically assumes a secondary or even absent *position* as a parent or housekeeper – as *indexed* by the word "*outstation*" used by Intan to describe the nature of her husband's work.

The difficulties associated with balancing household- and career-related tasks alongside motherhood are also usually constructed in the interview data through WM participants' judgments towards their own mothering practices. The following set of excerpts are from Cathy, a close friend of mine for more than ten years. I must note

here that only during the interview itself did I learn that she identified as a WM with flexible working hours, not as a SAHM as I initially thought. She, nonetheless, admits that it was difficult for her to define the actual scope of her job.

The utterances in the following excerpt (Excerpt 5.5) are Cathy's responses to my question as to whether she had faced any challenges in motherhood. She first responded by stating that she and her husband had to make many adjustments to their lives in order to prioritise their son's needs. She then elaborated:

Excerpt 5.5: *Cathy* [Forgoing many things]

Turn	Speaker	Transcript
154.	C	And there are many things that uh you have to uh forgo, and you know like think like uh. I don't know, like, like f for example, my husband and I, we we are here in Penang now. We don't have uh family or relative, here, and (coughs) so basically, our son is with us the whole time.
155.	R	Hmmm
156.	C	So previously, when I was not working, I was taking care of him full time right, so, there is no such thing as uh dating dengan suami or anything like that so, uh *[….no such thing as uh dating with husband or…]*
157.	R	Ahh
158.	C	Basically, we have to bring him along, uh for everything.
159.	R	Ohh
160.	C	So in events like, uh, we have to take a backseat lah in that sense for for that period of time.
161.	R	Ahh
162.	C	Yeah. But now that uh he has started attending school so we can steal a few times (laughs) but also also it's it's quite difficult and even when we do we still have regret like, uh, uhhh, it doesn't happen as often as before, yeah.

At the *denotative* level, Cathy draws on the transition from a SAHM to a WM to describe the challenges of motherhood. She focuses first on her past as a SAHM (marked by the adverb "*previously*" and past tense forms), whose relationship with her husband was compromised (in terms of not having exclusive time for each other) due to her responsibility towards their son. In conveying this message, Cathy uses the verb phrase "*have to*", indicating obligation, three times (turns 154, 158 and 161). There is a noticeable shift from reflecting on her individual difficulties in childcare in turn 156 (as reflected in the use of the singular pronoun "*I*") and negative effects of her past role as a SAHM to the more collective (as reflected in the use of the plural pronoun "we") positive effects of her current role as a WM (marked by the adverb "*now*" – turn 162) on her relationship with her husband which is accompanied with

laughter. This is, nonetheless, immediately followed by an explicit expression of difficulty and even "*regret*" that "*it*" (referring to their having more time for one another) does not happen "*as often as before*" (having a child) (turn 162). Much later in the interview (about 400 turns after), Cathy highlights the current challenges she faces as a WM. For example, when prompted to share the moments when she feels that she does not fit her own criterion of a 'good' mother (i.e. one who tries her best to meet the child's needs), Cathy immediately *relates* such experiences to her current role as a WM who faces a "*tough*" dilemma (turn 550) for not being able to provide her son enough time and attention because she gets "*really involved*" (turn 548) with her work-related tasks, even at home as a result of unfixed working hours.

Connotatively, Cathy draws on several competing discourses in Excerpt 5.5 to express her mothering challenges both as a SAHM and a WM. She mainly attributes her past mothering challenges to her role as a SAHM which means her spousal relationship had to take a secondary *position* in *relation* to her parental responsibilities. She is implicitly conveying here that her previous role as a SAHM meant that both she and her husband simultaneously jeopardised their roles as 'good' spouses. Despite partially expressing a positive orientation, Cathy also attributes her current challenges of motherhood to her present career role as a WM. She sees this as a challenge in terms of its effects on her role as a mother. In addition, even as a WM whose child has already started schooling, Cathy still constructs both herself and her husband as struggling to maintain the kind of relationship they had before having a child. Cathy's utterances are constructed in ways that suggest her need to compromise in any career *position*: being a SAHM in the past rendered her less of a 'good' spouse to her husband; and being a WM means that she now views herself as less of a 'good' mother to her son. Cathy, thus, can be said to portray herself in *positions* of *powerlessness* regardless of her career positions. The *different positions* have affected her evaluation of self *differently* in *relation* to her overlapping and fluid roles as a mother and a wife. With regard to these roles, her use of the singular pronoun to refer to herself when describing her parental role (turn 156) and collective pronouns elsewhere when describing her spousal role in *relation* to her husband (not their parental responsibilities) may suggest the constructions of herself as the main parent and her husband as a secondary parent in this excerpt, as similarly revealed in other excerpts analysed earlier.

Similar sentiments about the career-related compromises women inevitably make once they become mothers are also expressed by Lippy Morgan (LM), though in more explicit ways:

> It's either you you you have er you you you you sacrifice your career and be a stay at home mom and then you hundred percent fully or you need to just juggle both which is very very extremely tough. … I think nowadays people always look at of how how stay at home moms are, you know having to take care of kids 24/7. I think there's not much understanding on the extent of how challenging it is for a career mom to manage motherhood and career.
>
> (*Lippy Morgan*, turns 104-108)

Unlike the intra-group challenges revealed in Lippy Morgan's analysed interview excerpts earlier (Excerpts 5.3), in this snippet, LM highlights the distinct challenges *different* mothers with *different* career decisions face. She expresses her frustration that societies today tend to unfairly focus more on the challenges of SAHMs as opposed to WMs. Such a dilemma is also explicitly portrayed in her Facebook posts. In Post 5.2, for example, LM expresses the *differences* between the two career groups through a more 'diplomatic' and reflective narrative of a specific motherhood experience:

Post 5.2: *Lippy Morgan* [Juggling "both worlds"]


July 11 · Instagram ·

I had the most fulfilling Raya leave Alhamdulh. I spent almost 2 weeks being a full time mom with my boy! Its physically tiring and demanding being a mom. But whether we are working or staying at home..we all can agree we will go above n beyond for our kids.

When i was in New York i was seated next to a succesful female figure in the firm. She is a mom to a pair of twins. We spoke about our kids and i suddenly became slightly teary when i said i sometimes felt guilty working instead of being a stay at home mom. She said, "never feel any less of a mom because u choose to work for your son n family's future. It is the quality of time spent that matters not the amount.." And i hold to that words and never felt guilty ever since. Because every second when i am with ı, i give my all to be the best mother he deserves. I am fiercely adamant to juggle both worlds and at peace with myself with the decision i have made Alhamdulh..because, whenever i am with my son, i make sure i spend it well so i will have no reason to feel guilty when i am away from him. #diaryofaworkingmom #clingymommy #weekendhousewife

Like Comment Share

ı and 26 others

Denotatively, this caption conveys Lippy Morgan's reflection and evaluation of herself as a mother based on her recent "fulfilling" two-week leave from work for the "*Raya [Eid]"* holiday, during which she could fully care for her son. She reflects on the reassurance she received from a fellow WM to no longer feel guilty about her career decision. She expresses her short-lived experience as a SAHM and her long-term career role as a WM (towards the end of the caption and in the hashtags) in

gratitude as reflected by the expression "*Alhamdulh*", commonly used among Muslims to mean "all praises and thanks be to God". Compared to Post 5.1 earlier, she is more explicit here in highlighting her past guilt (the word "*guilty*" is repeated three times) and its *relation* to her decision to work as opposed to becoming a SAHM. Similar to Post 5.1 and her interview excerpts, however, Lippy Morgan expressly mentions her aspiration to be the "*best mother*" her son "*deserves*". Just as in the interview, she communicates the dilemma of having to "*juggle both worlds*", with a high level of assertiveness as reflected in the phrases "*it is the quality of time spent that matters most not the amount*", "*give my all*" and "*fiercely adamant*". The accompanying visual was a photo collage of twelve different images of her son (two of which also include herself), capturing her son's daily activities such as walking and eating.

Connotatively, Lippy Morgan consistently portrays herself in *relation* to her main *position* as a WM, almost always explicitly *in comparison* to the arguably *opposing* identity of a SAHM within the competing discourse of 'quality versus quantity'. Within this discourse, she underscores that the quality time she spends with her son can make up for the lesser time she spends at home in *contrast* to SAHMs. In this way, Lippy Morgan is reclaiming *legitimacy* for her career choice despite her initial feelings of guilt. Through the assertive phrases she uses, Lippy Morgan also rapidly shifts her identity from a *position* of *powerlessness* for her past guilt to a current *position* of *powerfulness* for taking control of her evaluation of herself. Despite acknowledging that she has to manage both motherhood and her career, Lippy Morgan is implicitly and simultaneously *positioning* herself as having *just as much* chance as a SAHM to be a 'good' mother. This interpretation is inferred from the several instances in the post in which she identifies herself as being no *different* than a SAHM. For example, through the use of more generic sentences, pronouns, the two last hashtags and the images used, she highlights the *similarities* which appeal to all mothers, especially when she mentions the unconditional demands and commitment of motherhood. It is important to note these *similarities* in order to understand the *differences* in the ways Lippy Morgan portrays herself in the interview and on social media. Despite her apparent wish to create more public awareness about her personal dilemma as a WM, I believe her more 'tactful' description of herself in Post 5.2 shows her consideration of other career-related 'types' of mothers who are in her social network. This shows the different ways identities are (co-)constructed on virtual platforms although the

interactions are not necessarily in 'real-time' or interactive. In general, the different parts of the post work together to portray Lippy Morgan's contradictory *positioning* of herself (as being simultaneously *different* from and *similar* to SAHMs), suggesting that her current career *position* allows her not only to be just as 'good' as SAHMs, but, in fact, also allows her to excel beyond the confines of motherhood. Such a *positioning* of self, however, is mitigated through her Islamic expression of praises, which *indexes* her Muslim identity and attributes her 'success' in motherhood and career to God. This observation, again, points to the simultaneous construction of religious identities within the discourses of the ''good' mother' and 'career relations'. All in all, Lippy Morgan draws on the *global* discourses of 'good' motherhood in challenging the stereotypes attached to WMs at the *local* and *regional* levels in Malaysia.

5.3.2 The best of both worlds? – Claiming agency by becoming a WAHM

The section will continue with an analysis of interview excerpts from Nadia and one Instagram post by Sarah. For the following conversation with Nadia, I asked her about the characteristics she felt constitute a 'good' mother. Nadia hesitatingly responded as follows:

Excerpt 5.6 (a): *Nadia* [Finding a solution]

Turn	Speaker	Transcript
949.	N	Macam seorang mak ni kena jaga anak dia sendiri (laughs). *[Different. Like a mom must take care of her own child (laughs)]*
950.	R	Ha wah! Dah, dah masuk tu (laughs). *[Ha wah! Already, already in there (laughs)].*
951.	N	(Laughs) Itu macam (giggles) aaa kalau kata, ah memang lah kadang-kadang kita nak kerja ni sebab kita macam keperluan juga sekarang ni kan? *[(laughs) That's like (giggles) aaa if say, ah of course lah sometimes we want to work because it's like a necessity for us also now right?].*
952.	R	Mmm hmm.
953.	N	Tapi kita boleh ikhtiar lah. Kerja sendiri. *[But we can find a solution lah. Work (on our) own].*
954.	R	Mmm hmm.
955.	N	Kerja, kena kerja yang (sighs) aaa boleh bawa anak. Macam ada kawan saya tu dia, dia jual insurans. *[Work, must work that (sighs) aaa can bring kid (along). Like there is my friend, she, she sells insurance].*
956.	R	Mmm hmm.
957.	N	Dia pun nak jaga sendiri anak dia. *[She also wants to take care of her own child].*

Denotatively in Post 5.6 (a), Nadia frames her definition of a 'good' mother within the normative idea that a mother needs to fully care for her own child(ren). The subtle reference to a mother's career decisions in turn 949 then gradually becomes more apparent. In turn 951 she mitigates her earlier response by showing her understanding of the current situation for mothers who need to work for financial reasons (as reflected in the adverb "*memang [of course]*" and the collective pronoun "*kita [we]*" in turn 951, as well as the noun "*keperluan [necessity]*). The laughter and a rhetorical question in turn 951 elicit confirmation from me. She then quickly gets to her point to show that she believes that mothers generally can "*ikhtiar [find a solution]*" by choosing a flexible job that allows them to care for children whilst generating money, which she exemplifies by explaining what a friend does. In the utterances beyond turn 957, she continues to compliment the flexibility of her friend's working schedule and mitigates her opinion by stating that:

Excerpt 5.6 (b): *Nadia* [Setting priorities]

Turn	Speaker	Transcript
973.	N	Bukan, bukan kita nak kata~ *[Not that, not that we want to say~]*
974.	R	Ha'ah.
975.	N	Ibu berkerjaya tak bagus, bukan. *[A working mother is not 'good', no].*
976.	R	Ha'ah tapi. *[Ha ah but]*
977.	N	Haa.
978.	R	Itu yang awak rasa priority-nya lah? *[That's what you feel is the priority lah?].*
979.	N	Kita pun, tapi priority anak lah untuk seorang isteri. *[We too, but the priority is the child lah for a wife].*
980.	R	Mmm hmm.
981.	N	Seorang aaa seorang ibu. *[a aaa a mother].*
982.	R	Ha'ah.
983.	N	Kalau ayah dia kena keluar kerja (laughs). *[If a father he has to go out working (laughs)].*
984.	R	(Laughs).
985.	N	Jangan ayah pula yang jaga anak (giggles). *[Not the father who is the one to take care of the child (giggles)]*

At the d*enotative* level, Nadia continues to elaborate her opinion about what makes a ''good' mother' by relating it to career decisions made by both the mother and father. This can be seen in the ways she explicitly reasserts the opinion in turn 979 and mitigates her opinions about WMs by repeatedly mentioning the word "*bukan"* and *"tak" ["not that/not/no"]* three times in turns 973 to 975. She also explicitly *contrasts* the responsibility of a mother, i.e. to take care of the child, to that of a father whose responsibility is to work, which is accompanied with some laughter.

Connotatively, Nadia mainly draws on the discourse of 'compromise' in her opinions, elaborations and example of the 'good' mother in the two related excerpts to highlight the 'superior' *position* of a WAHM. Although Nadia expresses her opinions about a 'good' mother in generic terms (and even when she provides an example, it is about her friend), her descriptions of the 'good' mother - centring on the characteristics of a WAHM in *opposition* to WMs - are her implicit way of portraying herself as a 'good' mother. This argument is strengthened through her largely positive orientation to her career role as a WAHM in earlier parts of the interview. The *contrastive positioning* is distinctive for Nadia describes the WAHM as the 'good' mother who contributes to the family in both ways: by caring for the children as well as generating income from home. Elements of gendered parenting are most apparent in Excerpt 5.6 (b) in which

Nadia explicitly differentiates the main responsibilities of a mother and a father in terms of childcare and work.

In these two interview excerpts, Nadia seems to constitute the 'good' mother entirely according to being a WAHM who can achieve 'the best of both worlds'. However, she mentions earlier in the interview that there are challenges as a WAHM, for example:

> Saya biasa, saya utamakan anak dulu. Tapi kat dalam ni kita jadi konflik (giggles).
> *[I normally, I would prioritise the child first. But in our heart (it) becomes a conflict (giggles)]*
>
> (*Nadia*, turn 332)

In this snippet, Nadia admits that even though she usually prioritises her children, she feels conflicted when her children approach her for attention while she is completing work-related tasks at home. This shows that although Nadia largely frames the decision to work at home as the solution to the 'work versus children' dilemma, she still occasionally draws on the theme of 'challenges' when describing her experience as a WAHM, which in this case is quite similar to the problems Cathy faces as a WM. The identity of a WAHM, thus, is not constructed exclusively within the discourse of 'positivity', but rather intersects with the discourse of 'challenges' because of conflicts within the domestic domain, as is evident in the interview data. Such a construction of self is also manifested in some of the participants' social media posts, such as in the following post by Sarah. The Instagram account through which she publishes this post is used for both personal and business purposes:

Post 5.3: *Sarah* [This is "my life right now"]

Denotatively, Sarah depicts in Post 6.4 her increased challenges in business, which she attributes to her increased responsibilities in childcare. In the caption, she refers to her older son (shown in the picture sipping food from a bowl) with the deictic expression "*this here*" to highlight that her life is mainly occupied with childcare responsibilities. She then intensifies this statement by emphasising the difficulties with two children, through the exclamatory expression "*multiply it by two!*". Her challenges are further elaborated in the second paragraph when she highlights in conditional terms the two conditions under which she could focus on both sections of her business (marked by the anonymised hashtags in the second and third paragraph). In terms of tone, the caption is apologetic (signalled clearly with "*I'm sorry*") towards her followers (most probably her customers and/or friends) for not regularly "*updating*", i.e. sharing posts on her Instagram account. The tone of the caption becomes increasingly hopeful in the last paragraph where she explicitly mentions her business plans. She references her religious belief through the expression "*InsyaAllah [with the will of Allah]*" (second paragraph), as well as "*Allah knows best*" and "*Please pray for me*" (third paragraph). All of the descriptions are written entirely from a personal point of view as reflected in Sarah's consistent use of singular personal pronouns like "*I*" and "*my*".

Connotatively, through the caption, image and hashtags, Sarah portrays herself as a WAHM whose challenges in motherhood *relate* closely to her challenges in her business work. Sarah constructs the post in order to allow her followers to understand that despite her overlapping roles, she ultimately prioritises her children. This is shown from the fact that despite Sarah's many plans for all aspects of her business, she can now only run the "*less demanding*" section of her business to focus her attention on her children. By portraying herself as sacrificing her intended work-related plans this way, Sarah can be seen to be implicitly *positioning* herself as a 'good' mother who prioritises her children, thus conforming to the dominant 'good' mother discourses. It is also interesting to note that the absence of any collective pronoun in the description of Sarah's mothering challenges reflects the discourse of absent fatherhood, making it sound as if Sarah is facing these challenges alone. Despite not mentioning other people in *relation* to her challenges, Sarah softens the sense of hardship through the religious expressions which *index* her identity as a Muslim who accepts the fate of her business. Such an identity construction renders Sarah in a *position* of *powerfulness* (for being accepting of her fate) and *powerlessness* (for being tested by something out of her control). Again, this observation alludes to the significance of one's faith in the construction of 'good' mother identities, which will be elucidated in Chapter 6.

Sarah's *positioning* of herself as prioritising her children here relates to the way she rationalises leaving her full-time job as a teacher after having a child: "…*siapa nak jaga anak I? […who will take care of my child?]*" (Sarah, turn 828). Despite ultimately being able to take care of her children on her own as planned and generating money from home, Sarah often portrays herself as struggling to manage both roles in the domestic setting. In fact, on her social media posts she later announces that she has to stop running her business completely because she is unable to manage both her career-related and mothering responsibilities. The post is just one example of many which shows how Sarah draws on the competing discourses of 'responsibility' and 'career' to portray herself as a WAHM who has to make compromises. Thus, although the WAHM participants frame their career choice as a solution enabling them to have 'the best of both worlds', it can be seen that many of them (three out of five WAHMs), as discussed earlier and in Chapter 2 (Duberley & Carrigan, 2012; Patterson & Mavin, 2009), still frame their career decisions as challenging, not much different from the SAHMs and WMs.

5.3.3 *Aren't all of us the same? – Challenging the demarcations between the three career roles*

"All moms are working moms"

(Courtney Patterson, in *Sarah's* Instagram post)

The section will look at the constructions of identities among participants who challenge the demarcations of career roles when describing themselves and other mothers from different career-role categories. To support this view, the analysis will proceed with interview excerpts from Zara and one social media post by Sarah.

The following set of excerpts are chosen because they illustrate Zara challenging the idea that a 'good' mother can be judged based on her career decisions (despite largely *positioning* herself as conforming to the dominant motherhood discourses). In addition, Zara herself admits to having been a mother in all three career categories. Before being a SAHM, Zara used to work both full-time and part-time as a newscaster on one of the Malaysian television channels, and later became a WAHM who sells hand-sewn products online. Earlier in the interview, Zara stated that sincerity is one of her perceived characteristics of a 'good' mother (see snippet in sub-section 4.4.1) and elaborated that:

Excerpt 5.7 (a): *Zara* [You can be a SAHM or WM but…]

Turn	Speaker	Transcript
493.	Z	You can be a stay-at-home mom, being 24-7 with your child but not being happy being at home.
494.	R	Ahhhh.
495.	Z	Errr you can be a working full time mom, but being an excellent time manager.
496.	R	Hmmm.
497.	Z	Because I I know I have friends who are working full time with big corporations, climbing up the career ladder, but they manage their lives err their family well

Denotatively, Zara immediately elaborates what 'sincerity' means to her by explicitly relating to mothers' different career decisions through some hypothetical and real examples. In the hypothetical example, Zara expressly compares a "*stay-at-home mom*" with a "*working full-time mom*", relating them to the traits of "*not being happy being at home*" and being "*an excellent time manager*". These characteristics are not normatively associated with the respective career-role categories. She then provides real examples of some of her friends who are WMs, but are successful at managing

both their careers and families. Here, she consistently uses the third-person plural pronouns "*they*" and "*their*" to refer to WMs. She then relates the example to her idea of sincerity which links to the mother's familial priorities (see sub-section 4.4.1). About 200 turns later, Zara again explicitly relates her idea of a 'good' mother to the mother's career decisions:

Excerpt 5.7 (b): *Zara* ["Ongoing battle"]

Turn	Speaker	Transcript
673.	Z	It's just sincerity I mean urmmm sebab ther- there cannot say full-times are better, stay-at-home moms are better, because there's ongoing sort of battle. *[…I mean urmmm because ther-…].*
674.	R	Hmm mm yeah yeah.
675.	Z	Especially postings on FB I macam gelak je, I macam nak je tulis like I've been there (laughs). *[…on FB I am like just laugh, I feel like I just want to write like I've been there…].*
676.	R	(laughs).
677.	Z	I've experienced all.

At the *denotative* level, what is noted in Excerpt 5.7 (b) is that Zara acknowledges her awareness of the conflicts between mothers from different career roles. She explicitly challenges the metaphorically-expressed "*battle*" amongst mothers based on careers by relating to her own experience as a mother who fits into all the career categories at different points of her motherhood experience. This is indicated in the expressions "*I've been there*" (turn 675) and "*I've experienced all*" (turn 677). She also conveys this through laughter and by relating it to what she sees on "*FB*" (Facebook) (turn 675). After these exchanges, she continues to elaborate that a 'good' mother is a happy mother who is fully engaged with her children at home regardless of her career decision.

Connotatively, Zara portrays herself as someone who is aware of the different career roles but rejects their stereotypical use as a way of evaluating 'good' motherhood. She presents objective comparisons through opposing hypothetical examples and the concrete example of her friend (rather than herself). In Excerpt 5.7 (b), she explores her own personal career-related experiences, using laughter to further reinforce her objective and *contrastive positioning* in *relation* to others on Facebook who 'divide' mothers of *different* career groups rather than 'uniting' them, thus fuelling the ongoing motherhood 'battle'. By evaluating her experience impersonally and avoiding her own personal experiences, she is implicitly *positioning* herself as holding *relatively*

authoritative views because she has experience of all 'types' of mothers, thus *delegitimising* those with alternative views or less broad experiences of the *different* career roles. All in all, in both of these excerpts, Zara portrays herself as a mother who challenges the normative association between the 'good' mother and the mother's career decision at the *regional* level in Malaysia, despite largely *positioning* herself as conforming to the dominant ''good' mother' discourses in other parts of her data. Zara's challenge to the dominant motherhood discourses portrayed on Facebook (those that typically promulgate mothers' *differences* in *relation* to their careers) also raises the question as to whether there are any other participants who challenge such discourses on the digital platform. Interestingly, the following Instagram post by Sarah captures a rather similar attitude.

Post 5.4: *Sarah* ["Working mums"]

Denotatively, Sarah reflects on this quote found in an article by Courtney Patterson in the Huffington Post online (see Patterson, 2016). Sarah's post indicates a shift away from her earlier questioning of her career decisions and challenges as a WAHM (in Post 5.3). She can be seen to explicitly mention the three career categories - "a *SAHM, a WAHM or a working out of the house mum*" – and highlights that all of them "*never stop working for your kids*" which matches the quote in the image, "*All mums are working mums*". The tone of the post changes from a questioning tone to a motivating

one, reflected in her message to all mothers, "*you are awesome!*" and a popular motherhood-related quote from the Islamic *hadith* by *Bukhari, Muslim,* which emphasises the high level of respect one should show to one's mother, three times more than to one's father.

Connotatively, Sarah's shifts her *positioning* of herself from a helpless mother who initially doubted her career decision as a WAHM in *relation* to two other distinct career roles, to that of an empowered mother who resists the rigid demarcation of identities in motherhood according to career decisions. The ways she embraces the multiple meanings of "*working mums*" alters her status from a distant and sceptical *position* of *relative powerlessness* to a positive *position* of *relative powerfulness.* By posting this, she is now not only able to motivate herself but also motivate other mothers to collectively embrace motherhood identities for their *sameness* rather than their *difference*. Sarah's strategy of linking the quote sourced from a US-based website to her own life, as well as to those of other mothers within her Instagram network, through the image and caption can be seen as her attempt to elicit awareness of a wider and arguably more *global* understanding of mothers. This is *contrast* to the relatively more restricted *regional* (Asian and Malaysian) and *local* (groups of mother friends, acquaintances, family members, customers, etc.) communities of mothers she knows. The use of the Islamic quote *indexes* her identity as a Muslim and signifies her attempt to justify her opinions and *relate* to the arguably *global* communities of Muslim mothers whose worth should not be measured by their career decisions. It is apparent again that various descriptions about and justifications for many of the Muslim mothers' career decisions are often accompanied by expressions that *relate* to religious discourses, which I shall analyse in the forthcoming chapter.

5.4 Conclusion

In this last section, I draw some conclusions from the data with specific reference to the two research questions stated earlier.

1a. What identities do the participants construct when they communicate about their opinions and practices of motherhood in relation to their career decisions in Malaysia?

Overall, the participants whose data are discussed in this chapter construct multiple identities, two of which are unquestionably the general identity of a mother and the more specific evaluative aspects of being a mother (e.g. 'good' and/or 'bad' mother), similar to the generic identities explored in Chapter 4. Other discursively constructed identities in relation to career decisions, however, are rather distinctive. The first obvious difference is that the participants portray themselves as and their ideas about the ''good' mother' in close relation to their own and others' specific career *positions* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), namely WM, WAHM, SAHM, or a combination of any of these categories. It is apparent that the participants are aware of the three normative career categories in Malaysia, even in their attempts to redefine them and subvert the stereotypes associated with them. These career-role identities, however, are not static and exclusive, as some of the participants can assume the identities of more than one category within the short thread of the selected excerpts and across various temporal contexts.

It is also important to note that the data analysed in this chapter reveal that career-related motherhood identities are often constructed alongside gendered identities within the discourse of 'gendered parenting'. The identities of the mother as the female parent, the main parent, the 'only' parent, and the wife, are pervasive across the participants and the textual platforms in the dataset. The emerging identity *positions* also lead to the implicit construction of marginalised identities, i.e. less or even misrepresented voices of certain 'types' of mothers. Some mothers often describe themselves as a minority whose voices are not sufficiently heard, and whose challenges are not widely or fairly acknowledged and represented *in relation* to other career roles. This observation exemplifies one of the ways in which participants in this study construct *different* 'intra-gender' identities. This is especially apparent among WMs and SAHMs who are often *positioned* at the 'extreme' ends of the 'career continuum'.

2a. How do the participants construct and negotiate their identities within the overlapping and often contradictory discourses of motherhood that relate to career decisions in Malaysia?

In relation to the second research question addressed in this chapter, it is observed that the participants (explicitly and implicitly) construct who they are by closely orienting to and sometimes combining one or more of the career-role categories - WM, WAHM and SAHM - within contradictory motherhood discourses. The explicit and implicit reference to these categories does not indicate the participants' static association with any particular one of them. Many of the participants construct their identities by drawing on various discourses, especially the major themes of 'judgments' (by referencing the discourse of 'good' motherhood) and 'career relations' (by referencing discourses related to the seemingly discrete career-role categories). Such constructions of identities *index* (Baxter, 2007) participants' judgment of the 'good' mother which is strongly *related* to their perspectives on the *different* career roles (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). This association may actually reflect either their reinforcement of or resistance to what is considered normative within the community of Malaysian mothers.

In terms of the specific *denotative* analysis (Baxter, 2007), many of the participants are seen to employ diverse discursive features to negotiate the challenges typically attached to the career category(ies) they best identify with. One of the common ways is by using different types of pronouns to *index* and highlight the *similarities* and *differences* within and across career roles, and the associated individual and collective struggles in mothering *in relation* to their own selves and others (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Such a diverse use of pronouns reveals intricate negotiations between their career *positions* in relation to others, and attempts to combat the stereotypical judgments often attached to the career categories. In addition, the participants use various structures including statements - that can be positive, negative or even contradictory, rhetorical questions, exclamations, exemplifications and conditional forms to justify and evaluate the career choices they make as well as reinforce their dilemmas. The use of various non-linguistic features like hesitations and laughter also create distinctive tones in the portrayal of themselves within similar and across different interview excerpts.

Evidently, *positionality* and *relationality* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) are the principles which have heavily guided the analyses to uncover the nuanced identities constructed in relation to career decisions through *different positionings* and *relationships*. The constructions of marginalised identities in *relation* to *different* career roles, for example, reveal that most of the participants construct various *positions* of *powerfulness* and *powerlessnes*s (Baxter, 2007) regardless of their career-roles. These principles also often overlap with the concepts of hegemonic femininities (Schippers, 2007) and hegemonic motherhood (Arendell, 1999; Goodwin & Huppatz, 2010), useful in unpacking the constructions of gendered identities among the participants. Across different discursive levels, i.e. *local*, *regional*, and *global*, many participants seem to adopt various *positions* depending on their implicit perception of hegemonic discourses of motherhood in *relation* to various contexts. Their ideas of hegemonic motherhood are usually heavily gendered, in the sense that they either reinforce or challenge the division of traditional gendered roles according to elements of femininities and masculinities, almost always indirectly perpetuating the idea of dominance of men over women. Although a few participants whose data have been analysed construct themselves and their husbands collectively as parents, most others oriented to the normative idea that women take on the main childcare responsibilities in domestic settings. Such constructions of identities are also evident in the selected social media posts. The norm of women as the main parents happens even among women who generate money for the family, despite them challenging the typical representation of motherhood as easy, and resisting the demarcations of the different career roles in Malaysia. There is also an obvious attempt by these women to use the relatively more public platform of social media to spread specific messages, and to have mothers' voices and challenges heard by wider society. The selected data also exemplify how social media can be 'eye-opening' platforms for the masses to understand the specific challenges of mothers in different career categories.

Moving on from this chapter, I consider how some of the participants draw on religious discourses (as implied in a few data excerpts in this chapter) to construct themselves in *relation* to the dominant 'good' mother discourses. The following chapter will, hence, investigate the ways the participants construct their 'good' mother identities by drawing on discourses of religion as well as the closely-connected discourse of ethnicity.

Chapter 6: Analysis (III) – Negotiating 'Good' Mother Identities in Relation to Ethnicity and Religion

6.1 Introduction

Following on from the previous chapter, the other two major emergent themes were 'ethnicity and culture' and 'spirituality'. Although these themes are not the most frequently coded (refer to Chapter 4 – Table 4.1), they do reveal the distinctive cultural processes of identity construction among the participants within the specific setting of Malaysia. These themes are highly relevant because Malaysia is widely known as a country that boasts a diverse yet harmonious racial and religious composition (Tourism Malaysia, 2018). A focus on ethnicity-related and religious discourses, hence, allows a 'macro'-level exploration of participants' identity construction processes that are influenced by specific norms, values and practices (Van de Mieroop & Schnurr, 2017) in particular social groups and settings. Secondly, the identities emerging from the participants' diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds are found to contribute to the conflicting motherhood discourses in Malaysia and the correspondingly complex constructions of 'good' mother identities. The themes of ethnicity and religion are possibly as significant as (or arguably more significant than) the impact of career decisions as shown in the previous chapter. In such a culturally diverse setting, the possibility of being judged by and the need to negotiate contentious 'good' motherhood ideals may intensify the pressures faced by many new Malaysian mothers. Many participants were found to draw upon and orient to their own and others' ethnic and religious backgrounds in the dataset, even when not explicitly prompted to talk about these aspects in the interviews.

I will, therefore, further analyse the multifaceted ways the participants construct and negotiate their identities in relation to the notion of 'good' motherhood, with a focus on the relevance of ethnicity-related and religious discourses. This final analysis chapter, thus, seeks to address these specific research questions:

1b. What identities do the participants construct when they communicate about motherhood in relation to the discourses of ethnicity and religion in Malaysia?

2b. How do the participants construct and negotiate their identities within the intersecting discourses of motherhood, ethnicity and religion in Malaysia?

In this chapter, I will first analyse the construction of 'good' mother identities which are directly associated with ethnicities. After this, I will focus on religious beliefs and practices, and discuss how the ethnicity-related and religious discourses interweave in the construction of the participants' 'good' mother identities. The conclusion will sum up the complex ways 'good' mother identities are constructed through the two pertinent discourses. In relation to these discourses in this chapter, I acknowledge that the way I construct myself as a Malay and a Muslim may have had some impact on the way the participants portrayed themselves during the interviews, as exemplified in certain interview excerpts later. Following the earlier analysis chapters, this chapter will be guided by Feminist Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis (FPDA) (Baxter, 2007), sociocultural linguistic principles of identity construction derived from Bucholtz and Hall (2005), and hegemonic femininities (Schippers, 2007), where relevant (see sections 3.2 and 3.8 for more details). Before further analysis, I will provide a general overview of the coding information for both the interview and social media data in relation to the major themes of 'ethnicity and culture' and 'spirituality'.

The following table shows snippets of interview data that have been coded to both the themes of the 'good' mother and 'ethnicity and culture' and its sub-themes (see Table 4.1 and Appendix 3), organised according to the number of codings, as generated by NVivo. Similar to two previous analysis chapters, the snippets are presented in English:

Table 6.1: Coding information and snippets from interviews for the sub-themes related to the major theme of 'ethnicity and culture'

Themes and sub-themes	**Number of times coded**	**Number of participants coded**	**Snippets from interviews inductively coded to the sub-themes and intersecting with the theme of the 'good' mother**
H: Ethnicity and culture	**174**	**18**	*"But culture plays an important role lah … We see the Malays are used to this kind of style, they will be, most of them follow this kind of style. The Chinese like this… while the Indians like this."* (*Jasmin*, turn 2339).

h03. Distinctive Malaysian culture	48	11	*"Especially the Malaysian, ... they're pushing too much their child, to study, study, study."* (*Eva*, turn 628).
h04. Malaysian 'good mother' ideals	41	12	*"Take care of, make sure the children are well-fed I guess ... make sure that the children behave."*(*Cathy*, turn 668).
h01. Identifying with particular ethnic groups	17	5	*"Thirdly, we wanted the baby to be Sarawakian. The only way for us to confirm that would happen is to give birth in Sarawak."* (*Vera*, turn 274).
h07. Tradition versus modernity	14	6	*"They (current mothers) try to learn the right ways by reading ....not blindly following tips from older generations in those days*." (*Jasmin*, turn 2305).
h05. Tradition	9	4	*"and being very traditional in terms of mindset a little bit, I wanted to be able to have a little bit of control of his growing up years because I knew I wouldn't have control when he is older."* (*Kiran*, turn 282).
h06. Traditional plus modern elements	9	5	*"I believe in erm mixture of both, natural traditional with modern. I think everybody should have a neutral and a good judgment, a neutral approach in analysing the methods."* (*L.Morgan*, turn 882).
h10. 'Western' cultural influence	6	4	*"So they do judge like why did you should be giving him apple first so I was like ok this is normal because these are like 'white people's' mentality they want apple first.*" (*Tasha*, turn 1414).
h13. Belief in unseen evil powers	5	3	*"And also as a Muslim we also believe in the evil eye. So we don't wanna encourage that."* (*L.Morgan*, turn 1046).
h12. Mix of cultures	4	2	"*So technically I have all the culture involved in my confinement."* (*Vera*, turn 106).
h09. A Malay	3	1	N/A
h02. Maintaining native rights	2	2	*"To get our native right, that's very important."* (*Tasha*, turn 18).
h08. Asian mothering mentality	2	1	*"I suppose it's the Asian culture, in irregard regardless of race ... it happens in all cultures, like we are we are taught, a certain mother would never let their their kids a good mother won't let their kids get dirty."* (*Bernice*, turn 756).
h14. Belief in 'feng shui'	1	1	N/A

Overall, Table 6.1 shows that 18 out of 19 participants mention aspects relating to ethnicity and Malaysian culture when talking about 'good' mothering, often comparing various cultural elements within and beyond Malaysia. Although sub-themes related to 'distinctive Malaysian culture' and 'Malaysian 'good' mother ideals' are found to be the most frequently-coded sub-themes, I shall only select excerpts that relate to ethnicity-related discourses because I believe they better exemplify the complexities of Malaysian culture, and the participants naturally talk about these issues without prompts. There are a number of social media posts, too, that are deductively coded to the theme of 'ethnicity and culture', as shown in the following Table 6.2. This table also demonstrates the intersections of both 'ethnicity and culture' and the 'good' mother themes in the captions of certain social media posts:

Table 6.2: Coding information and snippets from social media posts that are coded to 'ethnicity and culture' and relate to the ''good' mother'

Facebook/ Instagram	Number of times coded	Snippets from the captions of social media posts
Facebook	85	*"****'s first experience with Sabah Musical Theatre. Let me just say, Sabahans know how to put a SHOW* 🙌🏿 *. Thank you Auntie **** for letting him in. The best gift for a 10 months old bwoy* 👶❤️ *#sabahfest #gulugulu #nextyearletsgoagain"* [accompanied by a personal image of herself carrying her son at the venue of Sabah fest] (Tasha, FB_C3_45)
Instagram	103	*""…eight…nine…ten!" The little child is happy counting the marbles. Excited playing our traditional game. By creating gadget-free activities with children, their sensory will become more active. The brain will be actively thinking. Memories will be stronger. Beautiful moments will be remembered* 💞 *#****** #***** #happybabyhappy****"* [accompanied by an image of a child's hand playing 'congkak', a mancala game of ancient Javanese origin played in many countries in Southeast Asia] (Faz, IG_B5_3))
Total	**188**	-

Table 6.2 shows that there are slightly more Instagram posts coded to both of these salient themes. Both snippets presented in the table make use of emojis and hashtags in the caption. There are also posts that do not have any of these elements but are coded to the themes because other multimodal features such as images and videos are

deemed relevant to the themes. However, I did not find any of the social media posts coded to 'ethnicity and culture' to support the arguments in the interview excerpts that have already been selected for further discourse analysis. This explains why there are no social media posts related to ethnicities analysed in the forthcoming section 6.2. This is possibly because the participants presuppose that their social media 'audience' has similar ethnic backgrounds to themselves, thus resulting in less visible orientation to ethnicity-related discourses.

With regards to the major theme of 'spirituality', within which the sub-theme of 'religion' is situated, Table 6.3 presents information about relevant sub-themes and snippets of data, sequenced according to frequency:

Table 6.3: Coding information and snippets from interviews for the sub-themes related to the major theme of 'spirituality'

Themes and sub-themes	**Number of times coded**	**Number of participants coded**	**Snippets from interviews inductively coded to the sub-themes and intersecting with the theme of the 'good' mother**
G: Spirituality	**141**	**14**	
c02. Religion in mothering	94	12	"*Like I said just now my child I did not enough time to teach my child read Iqra (basic al-Quran) and whatnot. So I wish I have more time with her lah."* (*Jasmin*, turn 3613).
c03. Moral or religious values for child(ren)	25	8	*"Meaning she (a mother) prioritises aaa education. Children's education. So religion lah, of course."* (*Nadia*, turn 1019).
c05. Practising Muslim	11	4	*"Can learn about religion like translation of verses (of Quran) and whatnot… no need to think about who will take care of my kids right?"* (*Intan*, turn 1351).
c01. Spirituality	8	2	*"If you're not spiritual, it's so easy for you to feel down and all."* (*Tasha*, turn 1832).
c04. Becoming more religious	3	1	*"Err I want to be like macam more religious. Because I think if if a mother is religious is more disciplined towards the child."* (*Tasha*, turn 2307).

Overall, Table 6.3 shows that 14 out of 19 participants mention 'spirituality' in relation to the ''good' mother'. There are some social media posts too that are deductively coded to both of these themes, as shown in the following Table 6.4. This table also

exemplifies the intersections of the themes of 'spirituality' and the 'good' mother in the captions of some social media posts:

Table 6.4: Coding information and snippets from social media posts that are coded to 'spirituality' and relate to the ''good' mother'

Facebook/ Instagram	Number of times coded	Snippets from the captions of social media posts
Facebook	242	*"May Allah protect them and ultimately grant them Jannah [heaven]"* [accompanied by several distressing images of mothers in war-torn countries protecting their children] (Zara, FB_C2_16)
Instagram	136	*"It's been one of those days of balancing work and play. Despite the rough edges, it's beautiful to observe the underlying love of the Almighty towards a small fry like myself. Today, he sent too many kiddy potty trips to help me work on my sabr [patience], a traffic jam to make sure we made it to the mosque on time and a kid's bed wetting accident to wake me up for isya' prayers [the final daily prayer for Muslims]. And after all that, it rains! Allahuakbar [God is the greatest], now isn't that love*  *"* [accompanied by an image of the boot of her car full of soft toys she made for sale and a folded pushchair]. (Sarah, IG_B3_6)
Total	**378**	

Table 6.4 shows that more Facebook posts are coded to the theme of 'spirituality' than those from Instagram. Similar to the reasons provided in the previous chapter on career decisions, this could be attributed to the more public nature of Facebook and the features that make it easy and convenient to share public posts compared to Instagram. The coding process has illuminated relevant data excerpts suitable for further analysis. The selected data in the forthcoming two sections illustrate the intersections between the themes of 'ethnicity and culture' and the ''good' mother', as well as the themes of 'spirituality and the ''good' mother', respectively.

6.2 Negotiating identities associated with the intersecting discourses of motherhood and traditions related to ethnicity

"For Indians, the traditional way of bathing is different. There will be a special lady who'd come and massage the baby. And do kind like weird things…"

(*Kiran*, turn 469).

This section will investigate the construction of identities among participants who draw on ethnicity-related discourses when describing their experiences in motherhood. The analysis will begin with interview excerpts that show a more explicit orientation to ethnicity, such as through clear mention of ethnic identity and tradition, before moving on to consider those whose ethnic identities are more implicit, as demonstrated through the mention of certain customs commonly associated with a particular ethnic group. The section begins with excerpts from Kiran's interview. These are chosen because she explicitly describes her challenges after giving birth with regards to her levels of adherence to ethnicity-related traditional confinement practices. Preceding the following discussion, we talked about a number of 'traditional' motherhood practices, such as breastfeeding, that seemed to be making a comeback in Malaysia in recent years. When asked if she liked such trends, she stated that she could only accept some of them and began to share her personal challenges related to new-born care:

Excerpt 6.1 (a): *Kiran* [Coping with "additional things"]

Turn	Speaker	Transcript
455.	K	Like, er, I just I, debating with my mum the other day. Urhm, in, in in this Indian culture, we have to put er, you know we burn arang. *[...we burn charcoal].*
456.	R	Ah… ah…
457.	K	And then er we put the, I don't know what it is called er, in, English, but it's like a, it's a a kind of powder where we put on top of the arang more smoke to come out. *[...on top of the charcoal more smoke to come out].*
458.	R	Okay.
459.	K	'sambrani' they called it in Tamil.
460.	R	Okay.
461.	K	So, er, they always do this for newborns. So, once they finish er bathing er, they would put the 'sambrani' for the child. And I told my mum can we just do this for a few weeks because once I go back to my own home, er, that time she, my eldest was er, we have to go back after one month. Then, she said, no you still have to do it.
462.	R	How long?
463.	K	So, we did it for (laughs)
464.	R	I mean it has to be actually by right?
465.	K	They prefer like four, five months.
466.	R	Ohh.
467.	K	Yeah.
468.	R	And you wanted one month.
469.	K	(laughs) one month because I wasn't sure I was going to be able to burn arang all, on my own (laughs). I respect that you know, mothers, they very resilient, they would do all these things and do every other thing as well. Where else, for me, I just couldn't cope all the other additional things. So, that was one… *[…to burn charcoal all…].*

Denotatively (Baxter, 2007), in Excerpt 6.1 (a), Kiran describes the tension between herself and her mother in terms of the extent to which she implemented a traditional Indian custom on her new-born. To underscore her compromises, Kiran uses specific terms in Tamil and Malay, shifts her pronoun usage and draws on expressions indicating tension. On the surface level throughout this excerpt, Kiran portrays herself as an Indian through the overt mentioning of the adjective "*Indian*" (turn 455), the language widely spoken by the Indian community in Malaysia - "*Tamil*" (turn 459) - and the specific term for the Indian practice "*sambrani*" (turns 459 and 461). Through her use of the Malay noun "*arang [charcoal]*" (turns 457 and 469), however, Kiran constructs herself as a Malaysian Indian, one who knows how to communicate in Malay – the national language of Malaysia – and also one who is co-constructing identities with me as a fellow Malaysian and a Malay. The tension created in relation to her ethnicity is first observed in her use of the progressive verb "*debating*" in turn

455 to describe the nature of the recent conversation she had with her mother. The tension is more clearly narrated in turn 461 through the question that Kiran posed to her mother - "…*can we just do this for a few weeks*…?" - and her mother's adamant reply, "...*no, you still have to do it*". The tension is first constructed as 'small-scale' between herself and her mother, but later changes to reflect real conflict between herself and other Indian mothers who practise this traditional custom. This change is apparent through her shifting use of pronouns from "*we*" (turns 455 and 457) to collectively refer to the community of Indian mothers, to "*they*" (from turn 461 onwards) to exclude herself from the group. This is especially evident in turn 469 in which she provides practical reasons for not fully practising "*sambrani*" on her new-born. In the same turn, Kiran uses a positive verb ("*respect*") and the adjective "*resilient*" when talking about other Indian mothers but uses negative verb forms like "*wasn't sure*" and "*couldn't cope*" to describe her dilemma.

Excerpt 6.1 (b): *Kiran* ["I wasn't too keen"]

Turn	Speaker	Transcript
469.	K	…Urhm, and then the other one was the baby bathing. For Indians, the traditional way of bathing is different. There will be a special lady who'd come and massage the baby. And do kind like weird things like hold the baby on the, er, the top of part of the mouth. I can't remember, what it's.
470.	R	Palate.
471.	K	The palate, yes. Yeah, and, and blow through the nose and things, just to clear the system and things like that. Er, I told my mum not I'm not going to allow for that. So we only did the basic. We didn't go the full length of the whole massage and proper bathing. So, certain things I could, certain because the reason why I didn't want for it was because the skill and knowledge is not passed down properly.
472.	R	Ahh.
473.	K	So, I'm afraid to give the child to, put the child in the hands of someone who might not be really experienced in doing it and what if something happens, yeah. So unless, you know that person, your grandmother who has done it for many grandchildren and you are very comfortable and confident, and then that's fine. But, if you are calling someone else you don't know, like a special lady, you have to pay money, to do all that, I wasn't too keen. So,
474.	R	So, those are the things you don't really.
475.	K	Ya, we did get a bathing lady to come in to help bathe the baby for a month but just the basics, nothing too aggressive. For my second son, we didn't even get that. We did it all on our own.
476.	R	Yes, yes, yes. You only do whatever that you, the basic one
477.	K	Yes. So certain things I'm okay with, certain things no.

At the *denotative* level in this second excerpt, Kiran reinforces her portrayal of herself as a mother who makes compromises when it comes to ethnic traditions. The ways she discursively portrays herself, however, are realised through rather different patterns of negative and conditional structures as well as pronouns. She continues to underscore the distinctiveness of her ethnic identity through the explicit mention of the words "*Indian*", "*traditional*", "*special"* and "*different*" in turn 469. Unlike in Excerpt 6.1 (a), Kiran here seems to exhibit a more negative perception of the Indian baby bathing custom itself. This is apparent in her use of certain negative words and structures to refer to the custom as "*weird*" (turn 469), "*not I'm not going to allow for that*" (turn 471), "*I'm afraid*" (turn 473), "*I wasn't too keen*" (turn 473) and "*aggressive*" (turn 475). She relates her reservations to her concern for the safety of her new-born, especially being handled by someone who is not well-trained in the practice. Her sense of doubt is noticeable in the use of conditional structures like "*…what if something happens*", "*unless…then that's fine*" and "*But if, ...*" in turn 473. However, she states that she did observe the custom for her first son but reiterates her partial adherence to the tradition by expressing "*only*" (turn 471), "*basic*" (turns 471 and 475) and "*didn't go the full length of the whole massage*" (turn 471). Towards the end of the excerpt, she states that she disregarded the custom for her second son and mentions that "*We did it all on our own*" (turn 475). The plural first-person pronoun "*we*" (turns 471 and 475) most likely refers to Kiran and her mother (not her husband) in the context of these utterances. It is more likely to be her mother to whom she refers because she uses "*I*" in most other parts of the interview in relation to parenting decisions (e.g. turns 471, 473 and 477).

Connotatively (Baxter, 2007), despite expressly *indexing* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) and constructing her distinct ethnic identity as an Indian and a national identity as a Malaysian (through her use of Tamil and Malay words, respectively), Kiran portrays herself as increasingly detached from traditional Indian culture in terms of observing the two practices. This is evident in her *positioning* of herself as starkly *different* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) from her mother's standpoint. Her use of the increasingly impersonal and generic pronouns provides additional evidence that she is distancing herself from her Indian identity by *positioning* herself as a peripheral member of the ethnic group, in *contrast* to the wider community of Indian mothers whom she may perceive as fully observing the customs. Kiran portrays herself slightly *differently* in

the two excerpts in terms of her implicit *positioning* as a 'good' mother. The concept of *powerfulness-powerlessness relation*s in Baxter's (2007) FPDA helps to reveal Kiran's perception of power in relation to identity. The negative structures that Kiran uses in Excerpt 6.1 (a) to justify her inability to fully observe the "*sambrani*" practice (turn 469) can be interpreted as her way of establishing a *position* of *powerlessness*, linked to the idea that she is less of a 'good' mother in *relation* to other more 'disciplined' Indian mothers. In *contrast*, when justifying her lack of adherence to the baby bathing practice in Excerpt 6.1 (b), she constructs a *position* of *powerfulness* and assumes the role of a 'good' mother because of her agency in determining the best outcome for her children's safety. In terms of gender relations, the plural first person pronoun that she uses in turn 471 and 475 to refer to herself and her mother (instead of her husband) can be deciphered as her way of implicitly constructing herself as the main parent who handles most parenting decisions. Such a reference also points to the pertinent role of women in childcare at the *local*, *regional* and *global* levels (Schippers, 2007), rather than men. Kiran's willingness to disclose her motherhood challenges as related to her ethnic identity as an Indian exemplifies the salience of ethnicity in the construction of motherhood identities among a few of the participants.

In a related vein, there are also participants who construct their identities through competing ethnicity-related discourses when narrating their challenges in early motherhood but by sarcastically responding to the discourses. To illustrate, the following snippet captures parts of Vera's responses to my question, "*How was your first year as a mother?"*

> So my confinement was a bit. Hmm, how do you say, aahhh…it's aahh strangely traditional and not…because my mother-in-law is a Venezuelan and my mom is a Chinese, but my mother-in-law hire a Malay confinement lady for me. So I "bengkung" *[use tummy belt]* and everything (chuckles). Yeah, so technically I have all the culture involved in my confinement. So it just I just don't have to do anything (laughs). Like this culture says don't do this, that culture say don't do that (laughs). So it was a bit more difficult.
>
> (*Vera*, turns 104-106).

In this snippet, Vera describes how her confinement practice was influenced by multiple traditions related to ethnicities beyond her own (Chinese), such as from the Malay and Venezuelan traditions. Her overt mentioning of terms relating to her

ethnicity signifies that such identities are key to her sense of self. Her choice of words like "*strangely*" along with some obvious hesitations and some sarcastic laughter may, however, indicate Vera's reluctance to observe such traditional confinement practices. She mocks her strict confinement period by saying "…*I just don't have to do anything*", which refers to the many prohibitions imposed by traditional confinement customs. Unlike Kiran, Vera seems to *position* herself in this snippet as relatively *powerless* against the restrictions of ethnicity-related cultural discourses. This is inferred because even in the longer thread of the conversation, Vera does not once mention any resistance to such prohibitions. This suggests that she observed the traditions despite expressing her unhappiness. She, however, tries to portray herself as *different* and struggling by using the comparative structure "*it was a bit more difficult*", in *relation* to other mothers who may undergo more straightforward and 'mono-cultural' confinement practices.

Another participant who is found to draw on ethnicity-related discourses when describing her challenges in motherhood is Faz. This is done more implicitly than Kiran and Vera's interviews show. The following Excerpt 6.2 captures parts of Faz's responses to a question about her experiences during the first year of motherhood. She initially said it was tough because her daughter suffered from less common illnesses which she linked to her daughter's bouts of vomiting. The following utterances are Faz's elaborations on how she addressed her daughter's vomiting (turns 910 to 928) and skin rash problems (turns 974 to 982). Before the start of this exerpt, Faz described how her grandmother suggested that she observed a traditional practice of applying something warm to the abdomen of the child, which, as is evident below, she was uncertain about:

Excerpt 6.2: *Faz* [I can't accept that]

Turn	Speaker	Transcript
910.	F	Tungku ke apa tak tahulah. Ni letak kat perut tu. *[Hot stone or (I) don't know lah. This is what is put on the stomache].*
911.	R	Yang panas-panas? *[The one that is hot?]*
912.	F	Haa panas-panas tu. *[Haa the one that is hot].*
913.	R	Ha ye kot tungku. *[Ha yes maybe (it's called) hot stone].*
914.	F	Buat yang tu, takde jalan jugak. Aa mandikan dia. Letak, letak bedak tu, letaklah ini, letak emm macam-macam lah. And then dia tetap muntah. *[(I) did that, but it didn't work too. Aah (I) bathed her, Applied, applied the talc, applied lah this, applied emm many things lah. And then she still vomited].*
915.	R	Mmm.
916.	F	Pastu pun sampai nenek cakap aa hantu susu (laughs). *[Then up to a point (my) grandmother said aa milk ghost (laughs)].*
917.	R	(laughs).
918.	F	Itu tak boleh terima. *[That (I) can't accept].*
919.	R	Ok (giggles).
920.	F	Kenapa hantu susu (laughs) tak tahulah. *[Why milk ghost (laughs) (I) don't know lah.]* (5 turns ommitted)
926.	F	Tak tahu kenapa dia muntah. And then pergi, bawa pergi aa specialist. Jumpa, dia kata, siap kena x-ray semualah. *[(I) don't know why she vomits. And then went to, brought her to aa specialist. Meet (the doctor), he/she said, up to a point she had to be x-rayed].*
927.	R	Mm.
928.	F	Em bukan x-ray. Dia buat aa ultrasound. *[Em not x-ray. He/she performed ultrasound].* (45 turns omitted)
974.	F	Sampai pergi tabib Cina mana. *[Up to a point (we) went to a random Chinese traditional medicinal practitioner].*
975.	R	Ya?
976.	F	Yang kedai sensei tu kan? *[The Chinese medicinal shop right?]*
977.	R	Ha ah.
978.	F	Ha cari ubat nak bagi. Calamine lotion ke apa bendalah semua pun tak jalan jugak. *[Ha to find the medicine for (her). Calamine lotion or whatever thing lah all didn't work too].*
979.	R	Cuba mm. *[Try mm].*
980.	F	Last sekali bagi Bedak Batu Nasila. *[Finally (we) give Batu Nasila talc].*
981.	R	Ha.

982.	F	Yang boleh di, dapatkan dekat Utara je. *[Which can only be found in the north (of Peninsular Malaysia)].*

Denotatively, Faz portrays her challenges in motherhood in this excerpt as the tension between competing ethnicity-related and modern medical treatments. This tension is discursively realised through the words that are characteristic of the respective medical treatments, negative structures and certain adverbs. Unlike Kiran and Vera, Faz does not overtly mention her ethnic identity in this excerpt. Possibly due to her presupposition of our shared ethnic identity (Malay), her orientation to her Malay identity is implicit through reference to common traditional practices carried out by Malay mothers on small children, such as the "*tungku (hot stone)*" (turn 910) and application of "*bedak [talc]*" after bathing (turns 914 and 980), "*Bedak Batu Nasila*" *[Nasila Stone Talcum]* (turn 980), as well as superstitious references like "*hantu susu [milk ghost]*". We both laughed at the mention of the word "*hantu [ghost]*" because of our shared understanding of the Malay superstition that any misfortune could be attributed to evil spirits. Initially, Faz does not seem to perceive these beliefs positively. This is apparent in the structures she uses to indicate uncertainty, like "*tak tahulah [I don't know lah]"* (turns 910 and 920) and clear rejections such as "*Itu tak boleh terima [That (I) can't accept]"* (turn 918).

In later turns, she discusses her consultation with medical practitioners to address her daughter's health issues, using medically-associated words like "*specialist*" and "*x-ray*" (turns 926), "*ultrasound*" (928) and "*Calamine lotion*" (turn 978). In the omitted turns, Faz explains that the doctors did not find anything from the ultrasound but diagnosed her daughter as having a narrow oesophagus that caused reflux, and prescribed her with a specific formula. A month after consuming the formula, however, Faz states that her daughter developed serious rashes that forced her to then find a solution for this new problem. Terms pointing to Chinese ethnic traditions are noticed in turn 974 when she narrates that she sought guidance from a "*tabib Cina [Chinese traditional medicinal practitioner]"*. Furthermore, in turn 976 she uses the phrase "*kedai sensei*", referring to the shops in which traditional Chinese medical practitioners operate their businesses in Malaysia. In turn 978, she also makes it clear that she later sought treatment from modern medical practitioners. Up to this point, she underscores the number of unsuccessful attempts to find suitable treatment for her

daughter through the repeated adverbs "*sampai [up to a point]*" (turns 916 and 974), "*tetap*" (turn 914) and "*pun*" (turn 978) [both of which mean "*still*"].

Connotatively, despite *positioning* herself as resisting certain Malay cultural beliefs, the discursive features reveal Faz's portrayal of self as a Malaysian Malay mother who has utilised diverse medical avenues in Malaysia, informed by both scientific rationality as well as ethnicity-related traditions, to find a treatment for her daughter. This, along with her emphasis on the numerous attempts made outside her own ethnic traditions, can be interpreted as her implicit *positioning* of herself as a 'good' mother who unconditionally sacrifices herself for her daughter's wellbeing. She displays some degree of agency in her search for treatment. This is apparent in her clear rejection of her grandmother's suggestion that her child might be haunted by evil spirits (as shown in Faz's accompanying laughter). By using laughter to *delegitimise* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) such beliefs, Faz constructs a *position* of *powerfulness* in *relation* to her grandmother, in particular, and Malay cultural superstitions more generally. Another aspect to consider is the co-construction of identities between Faz and I, since we share *similar* ethnic and national identities (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). I observed that Malay participants like Faz tended to be more implicit (for example using questions and laughter) when orienting to their ethnic identity in interactions with me. In terms of co-constructing a national identity as a Malaysian, Faz tries to elicit my confirmation for the word "*sensei*" which is widely understood by most Malaysians to be a shop selling traditional Chinese medicines.

There are some participants who integrate both 'traditional' and 'modern' practices into their discussion of motherhood challenges in more explicit ways. Interestingly, it is noticed that whenever the participants mention 'tradition', the contextual clues would suggest that they are referring to traditions relating to ethnicity (not necessarily generational customs) and when they state 'modern', they are not only referring to the dominant medically-informed practices but more specifically, practices assumed to be observed by Caucasian mothers. In the following excerpt, Tasha not only portrays her 'diplomacy' when it comes to applying both 'traditional' and 'modern' practices in mothering, but also overtly quotes certain ethnic groups to exemplify her opinions. Preceding the following utterances, Tasha expounded that her notion of what makes a

'good' mother came from her own experience and the traditional practices she observed in her mother and mother-in-law. She then stated:

Excerpt 6.3: *Tasha* ['Traditional' versus 'modern']

Turn	Speaker	Transcript
1094.	T	Yeah (laughs). Traditional. Mana-mana yang I rasa tak ok dan I campur lagi moden punya style. *[Yeah (laughs). Traditional. Whichever that I think is not ok and I mix more with modern style].*
1095.	R	Aaah
1096.	T	We, that's why I cakap we kena baca a few things because ada cara melayu tak sesuai so we have to baca yang buku orang putih pulak. *[We, that's why I said we have to read a few things because there are Malay ways which are not appropriate so we have to read 'white people's' books too].*
1097.	R	Haaa.
1098.	T	Macamana they do in child psychology to diorang punya anak semua. *[How they do it in child psychology with their kids and all].*
1099.	R	Ha ah, ha ah.
1100.	T	So campur-campur lah. [So mixed lah].

At the *denotative* level, Tasha's orientation to ethnicity-related discourses is apparent through choices in verbs, adjectives, nouns and pronouns. Her 'diplomatic' approach when it comes to integrating 'modern' mothering approaches with problematic 'traditional' practices is most obvious in her use of the verb "*campur*" (turns 1094 and 1100) which literally translates to "*mix*" in English. In addition, Tasha's utterances in turns 1094 and 1096 are closely connected. It can be seen that she links the term "*traditional"* (turn 1094) to the mothering practices of the "*Melayu [Malay]*" (turn 1096) ethnic group. On the other hand, she specifically associates the adjective "*moden [modern]*" (turn 1094) with "*orang putih [Caucasian]"* (a non-native ethnic identity in the Asian region) (turn 1096). The link between "*child psychology*" (turn 1098) and the practices of the Caucasians, furthermore, *denotes* Tasha's perception that the mothering practices of Caucasian communities are more medically-informed. Through such a *contrast* between "*Malay*" and "*Caucasian*" and the use of the distant plural third-person pronoun "*they*" (turn 1098) to refer to the latter, she highlights the difference between her own ethnic identity and the Caucasians'. Interestingly, however, Tasha is not of Malay descent. She is of Suluk origin, one of the many native ethnic groups in Sabah, East Malaysia. Using the term "*Malay*", thus, is likely an attempt to relate to me, a Malay mother from West Malaysia. So although she uses the

word "*we*" (turn 1096) in her advice, she is possibly directing the advice specifically to me, a Malay, and arguably, to the 'Bumiputera' community in general (see Chapter 1 – section 1.3 for information on ethnic groups in Malaysia).

Connotatively, by underscoring the importance of integrating both "*traditional*" and "*modern*" mothering styles, Tasha *positions* herself as a mother who is not only practical but one who can negotiate different traditions to suit the needs of her child. In this way, Tasha is implicitly portraying herself as a 'good' mother in *relation* to other hypothetical mothers who may be more 'rigid'. Tasha's use of pronouns makes it seem like she is drawing on the 'us versus others' discourse in advocating the integration of cultural differences. Tasha's orientation to an ethnic identity that is not her own leads to two possible conclusions. One would be Tasha's attempt to relate to me, a Malay listener, and to construct a collective identity with me as Malaysians, or even more specifically as 'Bumiputeras', in *contrast* to the arguably dominant discourses of the 'good' mother that are perceived to be represented by the Caucasians, who are ethnically more *dissimilar* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) than her own. Another less obvious interpretation could be that Tasha uses the pronoun "*we*" and the adjective "*Melayu [Malay]*" to *index* our shared religious identity as Muslims. This is even more relevant because ever since marriage, Tasha has lived in West Malaysia, in which most Muslims are Malays. This is a justifiable interpretation given that the Malay ethnic identity is exclusively tied to Islam (Siddique, 1981), as explained in Chapter 1. Such discursive features may simply be her way of making her opinions applicable to both of us in the conversation. In short, Tasha's differing ethnic identity orientations can be seen as her conscious way of constructing and linking our shared identities in terms of our ethnic group, religion and location (West Malaysia). This interpretation highlights the salience of discourses of ethnicity and religion among the participants and justifies the need to further unpack the religious aspects in the following sub-section.

6.3 Negotiating identities in relation to the intersecting discourses of motherhood and religion

"I'm very spiritual so I want Ali to be like that as well when he grows up because the best relationship is with God"

(*Tasha*, turn 1826).

The analysis of excerpts thus far in the chapter suggests that the construction of ethnic identities is, more often than not, inextricably interlinked with religious identities. As shown in the latter analyses in the previous section, ethnic and religious identities are often simultaneously co-constructed, especially when the participants explicitly or implicitly express challenges that concern the notion of the 'good' mother. In this chapter, I will use the term 'religion' or 'religious discourses' instead of 'spirituality' as the analysis specifically focuses on these aspects of the broader theme of 'spirituality'. The analysis begins with data that show the construction of religious identities on general disputed topics in motherhood and ends with those on less contested topics.

The following excerpt from Faz's interview will be analysed first as it clearly demonstrates the construction of both religious and ethnic identities in motherhood. This excerpt revolves around a pertinent and controversial issue in motherhood which is often linked to religion - breastfeeding. Chapter 4 looked at the general link between breastfeeding and the notion of the 'good' mother. In this section, I intend to analyse how challenges in breastfeeding and the idea of the 'good' mother are closely tied to the discourse of religion. Faz is one of the few participants who criticises mothers for pressuring each other to breastfeed in the name of religion. Preceding the following responses, Faz explained the challenges she faced in breastfeeding and argued that God allows alternatives for mothers to feed their children. She then stated that she once joined a support group for breastfeeding on Facebook that was unhelpful because:

Excerpt 6.4 (a): *Faz* [That's very sinful]

Turn	Speaker	Transcript
746.	F	Diaorang macam aa macam mana nak cakap. Diaorang buat macam breastfeed ni satu benda yang wajib. *[They like ... like how to say it. They make breastfeeding like it's a compulsory thing in Islam].*
747.	R	Ouh.
748.	F	And then kalau ambil benda lain tu macam haram haa. *[And then if (we) take something else like it's forbidden haa].*
749.	R	(laughs).
750.	F	Betul. Dia jadi macam berdosa sangat. *[That's right. It becomes like very sinful].*
751.	R	Ye ke? *[Really?]*
752.	F	You ambil susu formula ke apa benda ni. *[(If) you take formula milk or what this is].*
753.	R	Ouh.
754.	F	Lepas tu aa macam apa orang kata. *[And then aa like what people day].*
755.	R	Yang, yang melayu, melayu ke atau semua jenis orang ke? *[The, the Malays, Malays or or all types of people?]*
756.	F	Yang group tu aa Melayu lah. *[That group aa Malay lah].*
757.	R	Mm.
758.	F	Group tu Melayu lah. *[That group is Malay lah].*
759.	R	Mm hm.
760.	F	Tapi memang lah tak dinafikan. *[But of course lah there's no denying].*
761.	R	Mm hm.
762.	F	Susu ibu adalah susu yang terbaik. Macam mana pun. *[(That) breast milk is the best. No matter what].*
763.	R	Mm hm.
764.	F	Yes, susu ibu terbaik. *[Yes, breast milk is the best].*
765.	R	Ha ah.
766.	F	Tapi kalau ibu tu macam aa Allah tak izinkan dia menyusu. *[But if the mother like aa Allah doesn't allow her to nurse].*

Denotatively, Faz's discursively realises her frustration about misleading opinions regarding breastfeeding through the use of an impersonal pronoun, certain words *denoting* Islam and some contradictory structures. When referring to mothers who criticise others' decisions, Faz uses the third-person plural pronoun "*diaorang"* (turn 746), which is the colloquial Malay pronoun for "*they*". The issue is easily identifiable by me as distinctive to the community of Muslim mothers not only because we share *similar* ethnic and religious identities, but also because of her use of adjectives like "*wajib [compulsory]*" (turn 746), "*haram [forbidden]*" (turn 748) and "*berdosa [sinful]*" (turn 750). These terms are commonly used to make judgments about the

permissibility of practices in Islam (Shakir, 2002). The noun "*Allah* [the name for God in Islam]" in turn 766 strongly hints at Faz's identification as a Muslim and provides evidence of her making reference to the ultimate *authority*, God (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), in showing compassion to other mothers who are unable to breastfeed. After some probing, Faz confirms twice that the mothers are indeed "*Melayu [Malay]*" (turns 756 and 758), thus reinforcing the inextricable association between the Muslim and Malay demographic identities. It is interesting to note that between turns 760 and 764, Faz includes a 'disclaimer' to show her acknowledgement of the benefits of breastfeeding. This begins with the conjunction "*but*" to indicate contradiction, appearing again in turn 766 to revert to her earlier point. About 500 turns later, Faz talks again about this issue. This time, Faz is not merely reiterating her points in Excerpt 6.4 (a) but also highlighting her scepticism over the issue through the overt mentioning of social media. She implies that the Quran, the Holy Book in Islam, can only be accurately interpreted by those who have high levels of understanding of the Book:

Excerpt 6.4 (b): *Faz* [Is this right?]

Turn	Speaker	Transcript
1222.	F	Tapi kalau baca Facebook tu macam berdosa je tak bagi menyusu. *But if (we) read on Facebook as if it's sheer sinful if (you) don't breastfeed.*
1223.	R	Yeah.
1224.	F	Ha tu yang rasa, betul ke ni ha? Hmm. *[Ha that's why (I) thought, is this right ha? Hmm.].*
1225.	R	Betul ke? *[Really?]*
1226.	F	Walaupun diaorang aa cakap yang based on Quran. *[Although they aa talk based on the Quran].*
1227.	R	Mm hm.
1228.	F	Tapi rasanya em istilah, nak tafsir Quran tu pun, ayat tu pun lain kan? *[But (I) think em the terminology, to interpret the Quran, the verses are also different right?].*
1229.	R	Mm hm.
1230.	F	Haa kalau kita ilmu tinggi dalam Quran tu, tafsirnya lain. *[Haa if we have high level of knowledge of the Quran, the translation is different].*

At the *denotative* level, Faz constructs her Muslim identity through the adjective "*berdosa [sinful]*" (turn 1222) and the thrice-repeated noun "*Quran*" (turns 1226-1230), words associated with Islam. Here she mentions Facebook as the social media platform on which certain Muslim mothers cite the Quran in order to pressure mothers

to breastfeed. Through her rhetorical questions in turns 1224 and 1228, Faz expresses scepticism but also seeks approval from me, a Malay Muslim mother, about the issue.

At the *connotative* level, in both Excerpts 6.4 (a) and (b), the use of adjectives and nouns closely associated with Islam, as well as the link between Islam and Malay ethnicity in Malaysia, *indexes* Faz's portrayal of self as a Malay Muslim. Despite venting about the mothers whose ethnic and religious identities are *similar* to hers, Faz uses the distant third-person pronoun to construct herself in a *position* of 'other', a Malay Muslim mother who is *different* to the wider community of Malay Muslim mothers whom she witnesses on social media. By referencing social media, she implicitly portrays herself as a mother who is an active social media user and as someone who perceives and uses the platform *differently* from other mothers. The comparison of their *opposing* sentiments shows the relevance of the *relationality* principle in understanding Faz's portrayal of herself as a 'good' mother in the excerpts. The colloquial Malay pronoun "*diaorang [they]*" used by Faz in the excerpts is rarely used to refer to those with higher intellect, status and/or rank. Such pronoun use, along with the rhetorical questions (which indicate her questioning attitude), reveals Faz *delegitimising* the opinions of those mothers. In this way, Faz establishes a *position* of *relative powerfulness,* and thus a 'good' mother who is cautious and not easily blinded by the purportedly Islamic claims made by other mothers. She can also be seen to imply that her *position* as a mother is 'better' in *relation* to those mothers through the disclaimer she provides. It indicates that she understands their logic and acknowledges the general fact that breast milk is preferable, whilst simultaneously constructing herself as a mother who is practical and compassionate towards other mothers' specific challenges in breastfeeding. In fact, at the end of the interview, Faz states that Muslims today need to know how to adapt their religion to the specific situations they are currently living in (turns 3506 to 3508).

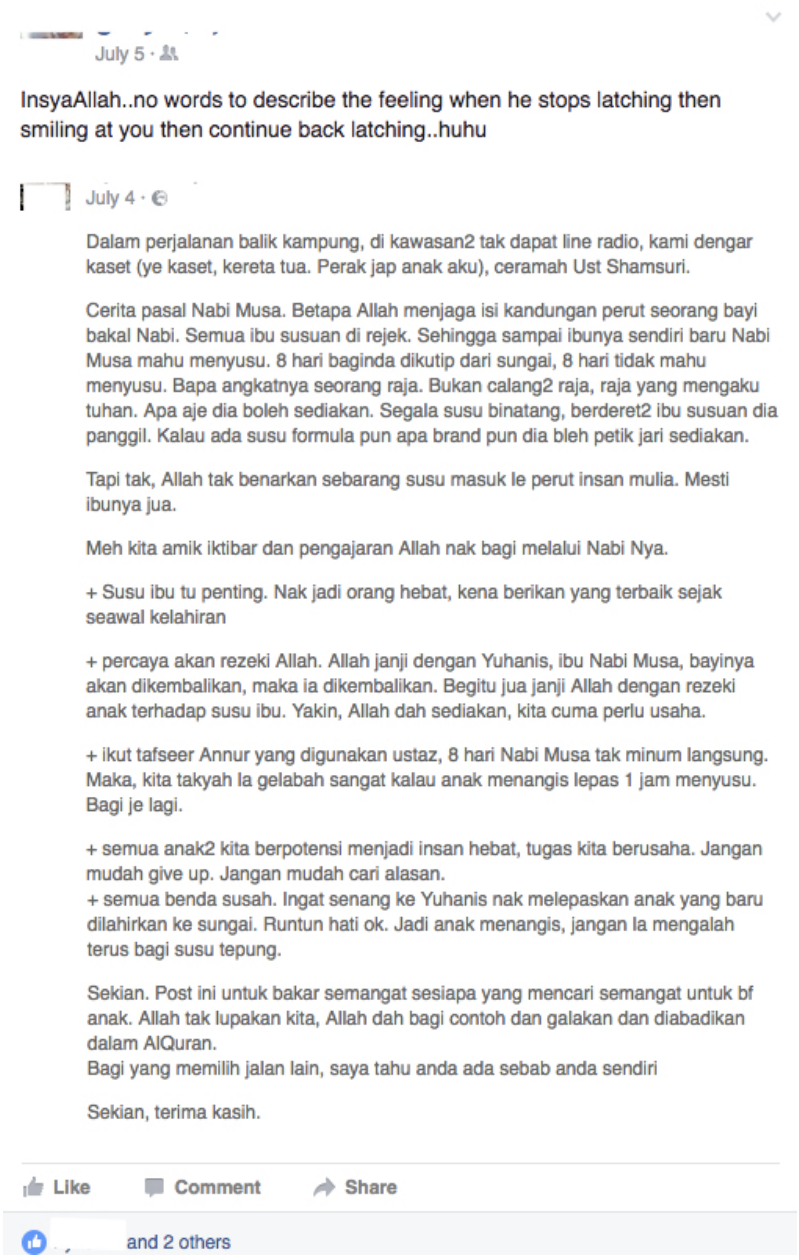
Faz is not the only mother who is aware and critical of other Muslim mothers' 'extreme' sentiments regarding the need to breastfeed. Tasha, along with a few other mothers, quotes a female Islamic scholar who promotes breastfeeding to communities of Muslim mothers by claiming that children who are fed with cow's formula milk will become 'cows' (metaphorically implying 'stupidity' or 'having no human values') (turn 1704). On the other hand, other participants draw on the discourse of religion,

specifically Islamic discourse, to highlight their positive perception of breastfeeding, not the challenges. When discussing the issue of the growing breastfeeding 'trend', Sarah, for example, says that breastfeeding is a convenient and inexpensive way of feeding her children, and that:

> Memang Alhamdulillah. And then to me it's natural like something macam breastfeeding is tuntutan Allah…. Doing what He likes is, is normally my priority. *[Indeed all praises to Allah (God). And then to me it's natural like something like breastfeeding is what Allah wants…].*
>
> (*Sarah,* turns 2334 to 2336).

In this snippet, Sarah expresses clearly her gratitude for being able to breastfeed her sons and describes breastfeeding as "*natural*" and "*tuntutan Allah [what Allah wants]*". She can be seen here to implicitly portray herself as a 'good' Muslim mother not only for her ability to breastfeed but also in her adherence to her religious duty. Another Muslim mother who also positively relates the discourses of religion and breastfeeding is Qisya. She does this mostly on Facebook. For example, she portrays herself as a mother who promotes breastfeeding by sharing the following post that, debatably, revolves around the story of Prophet Musa [Moses]:

Post 6.1: *Qisya* ["No words to describe"]



July 5 ·

InsyaAllah..no words to describe the feeling when he stops latching then smiling at you then continue back latching..huhu

July 4 ·

Dalam perjalanan balik kampung, di kawasan2 tak dapat line radio, kami dengar kaset (ye kaset, kereta tua. Perak jap anak aku), ceramah Ust Shamsuri.

Cerita pasal Nabi Musa. Betapa Allah menjaga isi kandungan perut seorang bayi bakal Nabi. Semua ibu susuan di rejek. Sehingga sampai ibunya sendiri baru Nabi Musa mahu menyusu. 8 hari baginda dikutip dari sungai, 8 hari tidak mahu menyusu. Bapa angkatnya seorang raja. Bukan calang2 raja, raja yang mengaku tuhan. Apa aje dia boleh sediakan. Segala susu binatang, berderet2 ibu susuan dia panggil. Kalau ada susu formula pun apa brand pun dia bleh petik jari sediakan.

Tapi tak, Allah tak benarkan sebarang susu masuk le perut insan mulia. Mesti ibunya jua.

Meh kita amik iktibar dan pengajaran Allah nak bagi melalui Nabi Nya.

+ Susu ibu tu penting. Nak jadi orang hebat, kena berikan yang terbaik sejak seawal kelahiran

+ percaya akan rezeki Allah. Allah janji dengan Yuhanis, ibu Nabi Musa, bayinya akan dikembalikan, maka ia dikembalikan. Begitu jua janji Allah dengan rezeki anak terhadap susu ibu. Yakin, Allah dah sediakan, kita cuma perlu usaha.

+ ikut tafseer Annur yang digunakan ustaz, 8 hari Nabi Musa tak minum langsung. Maka, kita takyah la gelabah sangat kalau anak menangis lepas 1 jam menyusu. Bagi je lagi.

+ semua anak2 kita berpotensi menjadi insan hebat, tugas kita berusaha. Jangan mudah give up. Jangan mudah cari alasan.
+ semua benda susah. Ingat senang ke Yuhanis nak melepaskan anak yang baru dilahirkan ke sungai. Runtun hati ok. Jadi anak menangis, jangan la mengalah terus bagi susu tepung.

Sekian. Post ini untuk bakar semangat sesiapa yang mencari semangat untuk bf anak. Allah tak lupakan kita, Allah dah bagi contoh dan galakan dan diabadikan dalam AlQuran.
Bagi yang memilih jalan lain, saya tahu anda ada sebab anda sendiri

Sekian, terima kasih.

Like Comment Share

and 2 others

The main content shared here is the original writer's (a woman) narration of the time she was listening to a recorded Islamic talk by "*Ustaz Shamsuri*" in the car. The title "*Ustaz*" is usually used for a man who has relatively more knowledge about Islam than the general Muslim community. Since the original Facebook post above (published on July 4, 2016) was written in Malay, its summarised translation is provided as follows:

The Ustaz was telling a story about Prophet Musa (more widely known as Moses) of how Allah takes good care of what is consumed by a Prophet-to-be. It was narrated here that when Prophet Musa was an infant, he kept on rejecting the breast milk from other mothers in his first eight days of life even though his adopted father was very rich and could buy any type of milk for him. The writer was emphasising the fact that Allah did not allow any other milk in the body of a sacred person like him except his own mother's breast milk. Then the writer states "Let's learn some lessons that Allah wants to convey through His Prophet".

+ Breastmilk is important from birth to raise great human beings.

+ Mothers need to believe in Allah's sustenance. Just like what happened to Moses, mothers should be confident that Allah gives enough breast milk for mothers to provide for their child. Mothers just need to make an effort.

+ Based on the Ustaz's interpretation of a verse in the Quran, Moses did not drink anything at all for eight days. A mother thus should not be excessively worried if the child cries after one hour of nursing. Just give more.

+ All children have the potential to be great. A mothers' role is to make an effort. Don't easily give up and give excuses.

+ Everything is difficult. Do you think it was easy for Moses' mother to let go of her son at the river? So if your child is crying, do not give up by giving him formula milk right away.

That is all. This post is to motivate anyone who is trying to find motivation to breastfeed their children. Allah has already given examples and encouragement from the stories in the Quran. For those who choose a different way, I know you have your own reason. The end. Thank you.

Denotatively, the analysis will focus more on what Qisya writes in the caption than in the original post. Qisya does not respond directly to the exact content of the post, which centres on the allegedly historical story of a Prophet in Islam and Islamic teachings that are meant to motivate Muslim mothers to breastfeed their children. Qisya starts her caption with a common expression in Arabic which is "*InsyaAllah*", meaning "*if Allah [God] permits*". Although this may seem like a very simple response to the lengthy original post, it captures her overall positive feelings about the message conveyed. It also *denotes* that she is currently breastfeeding and reflects her hope to continue doing so and reap the supposed benefits. She then adds that her own personal experience of breastfeeding her son - "*no words to describe the feeling when he stops latching then smiling at you then continue back latching*" - with the word "*latching*" indicating the moment when her son performs a strong sucking motion during

breastfeeding. She ends the caption with "*huhu*", a form commonly used on social media to indicate laughter, implying that she found the incident amusing.

Connotatively, the use of the Arabic expression discloses Qisya's *positioning* of herself as a mother whose opinions about breastfeeding are in line with what is advocated in the article, and *indexes* her identity as a Muslim mother. The validity of the article's content can be questioned, especially when there have been many reported cases of fabricated *hadiths* circulated by misinformed Malaysian religious scholars (Fairuz, 2018). Therefore, Qisya's concise and unquestioning response to the purportedly historical account about the life of Prophet Musa in the caption reinforces her positive opinions about and experiences with breastfeeding, thus implicitly *positioning* herself as a 'good' mother – one who, according to the article, selflessly perseveres to produce great human beings. Her additional anecdote can be interpreted as her way of supporting the reported benefits of breastfeeding by conveying the message that her son is showing gratitude for it. It can be seen here that the discourse of religion influences Qisya's response more than the possibly biased discourse of 'gender differentiation' as the source of the historical information about breastfeeding comes from an "*Ustaz*", a male religious scholar. Also, this positive anecdotal account *positions* Qisya as a 'breastfeeding advocate' who motivates other mothers to breastfeed (a common *position* among participants who post about breastfeeding on social media), in *contrast* to the way Faz constructs her identities in relation to the issue earlier.

Another controversial issue among Muslim parents is vaccination, which evokes doubts with regards to its permissibility, thus leading to incongruent opinions among Islamic scholars and Muslim parents worldwide. Dyana is one participant who questions the recent anti-vaccination trend gaining popularity among certain parents (Ahmed, Lee, Bukhsh, Al-Worafi, Sarker, Ming & Tahir, 2018). Before the following conversation in Excerpt 6.5, Dyana spoke about recently hearing about the anti-vaccination trend:

Excerpt 6.5: *Dyana* [Doubting our decisions]

Turn	Speaker	Transcript
851.	D	Pastu I pon cam, eh kenape pulak ah...pastu kite start to doubt pasal kitorang ambik semue, macam me and my husband (chuckles) kan I cakap anak first, semue pnemoccocal ke, ape ke, semue kitorang ambik, pasal doctor yang cadang kan. Kalau doctor cakap, alah sebenarnye tak perlu dah ade dalam, yang triple ape bende tu, tak tak ambik. *[After that I was like, eh why would that be ah… after that we start to doubt about what we take, like me and my husband (chuckles) right I say my first child, all pnemoccocal or, what or, everything we take (for him), because the doctor suggested right. If the doctors say, a lah actually (you) don't need because it's all in, the triple (vaccination) and things as such, no no (we) wont take (for him)].*
852.	R	Hmm tak lah. *[Hmm no lah].*
853.	D	Tapi kalau macam ni, yang kite punye choice kan, sendiri yang nak tambah tambah tu, sebab doctor dah, lagi pon doctor (unintelligible) paediatrician kite dah percaye kan, pastu macam kite ambik je lah walaupun kos die macam, tapi...at least if anything happens we know we did something to prevent it kan. *[But if like this, our own choice right, it's our own choice to add add that, because doctors have, after all doctors (unintelligible) our paediatricianwhom we have already trusted right, and then like we just take lah although the costs are like, but… at least if anything happens we know we did something to prevent it right].*
854.	R	Haa a ah.
855.	D	Bile diorang cakap camtu, kate eh tak tau dalam tu kandungan halal haram semue (unintelligible). *[When they say like that, saying eh (you) don't know the ingredients in it are permissible or forbidden in Islam and all (unintelligible)].*
856.	R	Ohh itu lah die punye argument mase tu, halal haram. *[Ohh that's the thing her arguments at that time, permissible or forbidden in Islam].*
857.	D	Haa mase tu I, kan that's the first time I sedar pasal bende tu, I rase cam, wahh ade orang yang anti-vaccine aa, I mean, tak pernah lah I ade adik semue, adik I semue lah pegi inject, tak pernah pon my mom cakap, ee tak boleh inject. *[Haa at that time I, right that's the first time I realized about it, I felt like, wahh there are people who are anti-vaccine aa, I mean never lah I have younger siblings, all of them got shots, never once my mother said, ee cannot have shots].*
858.	R	Hmm ha ahhh.
859.	D	Bende yang kite dah biase. Pastu bile ade tetibe start menentang tu rase cam, oh my god, ha kite pon start membace lah…betul ke? *[Things which we are used to. And then when suddenly there are people who are against (vaccination) (I) feel like, oh my god, ha we also started reading lah…is that right?].*

Denotatively, Dyana expresses scepticism about the anti-vaccination trend among some mothers. She uses adjectives reflecting the teaching of Islam, rhetorical

questions, personal and impersonal pronouns and references to medical *authority*. In general, the whole excerpt carries a strong tone of scepticism since Dyana cannot understand the allegedly Islamic justification for a practice her Muslim family has been used to doing, and which has a strong basis in the medical field. Dyana also uses rhetorical questions such as "*eh kenapa pulak? [eh why would that be?]"* (turn 851) and "*betul ke? [is that right?]"* (turn 859) to highlight her doubts. In terms of pronouns, Dyana uses the first person plural pronoun "*kite/kitorang [we]*". In Malay, there is a slight difference between the use of the standard pronoun "kita" ('we' – including the listener) and "kami" ('we' – excluding the listener). In this context, Dyana uses "*kite/kitorang*" (turns 851, 853, 859) (the informal word, pronunciation and spelling for the word "kita" among the people from the central and southern regions of Peninsular Malaysia (Sulaiman, Mashudi & Juliliyana, 2007) to refer to me and possibly other mothers who she presumes to make up the majority of pro-vaccination Muslim mothers. Nonetheless, the pronoun "*kitorang*" (turn 851), the colloquial form of the word "kami", is used more specifically to refer to herself and her husband. This is signalled by the phrase "*me and my husband*" within the same turn. She uses the plural third-person pronoun "*diorang*" (turn 855) which is the colloquial term for "mereka [they]" to refer to "*orang yang anti-vaccine [people who are anti-vaccine]"* (turn 857). To reinforce her choice to vaccinate her children, Dyana appeals to medical *authorities* like the "*doctor*" (turns 851 and 853) and "*paediatrician*" (turn 853) to *denote* that she and her husband (as well as her parents) have vaccinated their children, so that "*at least if anything happens we know we did something to prevent it kan [right?]?*" (turn 853).

At the *connotative* level, Dyana's overt mentioning and evaluation of other mothers' "*halal-haram*" arguments about the permissibility of vaccines in Islam *indexes* her identity as a Muslim mother. Her questioning tone and the differing referents used, however, reveal that Dyana *positions* herself as *different* from the group of mothers whose vaccination decisions for their children are *opposing*. During the conversation, our identities as pro-vaccination Muslim mothers are implicitly co-constructed through my repeated agreement marker "*Ha ah*" (turns 854 and 858), which allows Dyana to elaborate further. It is also interesting to note that in justifying her views, Dyana uses the first person plural pronoun to include her husband, thus simultaneously constructing their identities as 'good' parents who are equally involved in making such

an important parenting decision. In this way, Dyana challenges the hegemonic discourse of parenthood which *positions* the father as the (more) absent parent (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Schippers, 2007). This reveals Dyana's attempt to disassociate gendered expectations of mothers as the only or the main carer for children. The reference to medical *authorities* strengthens the co-*positioning* of her and her husband as 'good' parents who make decisions informed by scientific rationality in *relation* to the other group of mothers who are deemed to be following a 'fad'. The construction of 'good' mother identities using scientific-rational discourses is common among many of the participants in this study when they discuss issues relating to their children's wellbeing.

Moving on to another participant, Qisya's responses in the following snippet capture a rather opposing perspective with regards to the anti-vaccination movement. Of all the participants, Qisya is one of two women (the other is Jasmin) who disclosed to me in the interview that they have not vaccinated their children. The following snippet by Qisya is included because even though Qisya constructs herself as belonging to the 'anti-vaccination' group, she criticises mothers who use religion to justify their choice:

> Aa macam janganlah betul-betul sokong sangat macam anak anak tak nak vaccine anak tak nak vaccine tapi bagi bagi reason yang macam, stupid punya reason…. macam (laughs) macam aa, apa sebab takut orang…. sebab macam, aa tak halal, aa aa agenda Yahudi apa semua…macam make sure kau ada valid reason untuk tak nak vaccination anak kau. Macam saya, anak saya saya delay dulu. Dia memang tak pernah vaccinate dari lahir, sebab saya ada allergy.
>
> *[Aa like don't la really really support (anti-vaccination) like not wanting to vaccine children, not vaccinating but provide provide reasons which are like, stupid reasons…. Like (laughs) like aa, why scare people…. Because like, aa not permissible, aa aa Zionist agenda and all… like make sure you have a valid reason to not vaccinate your child. Like me, my child I delay (his vaccination) first. He has indeed never been vaccinated since birth, because I have allergies.]*
>
> (*Qisya*, turns 732 to 738).

In the snippet, Qisya is critical of other mothers who are deemed to provide "*stupid*" reasons for not vaccinating their children, such as judging the shots as "*tak halal [not permissible or forbidden]*" and "*agenda Yahudi [Zionist agenda]*", both of which are negatively perceived by Muslim communities in general (Ahmed et al., 2018; Castro,

2017). She reiterates the importance of providing a valid reason for not vaccinating. She provides an example of a 'valid' reason using her own situation in which she has not vaccinated her son yet (her son was five months old at the point of the interview) because of her worries that he might develop an allergic reaction as she did. In other words, she is implying that her reason is valid because it has medical justification. In *delegitimising* other mothers' opinions as "*stupid*", she constructs herself in a superior *position* to those mothers, despite their similar vaccination choice. As such, she is implicitly *positioning* herself as a 'good' mother who wisely and rationally protects the safety of her child. Overall, although Qisya sides with the anti-vaccination stance, she constructs the *position* of a 'good' mother using a similar discursive strategy to Dyana, by *delegitimising* other mothers' religious justifications.

Some participants challenge the growing anti-vaccination movement in more assertive ways. Since some Muslim mothers cite religious reasons for rejecting vaccination, a few pro-vaccination participants, like Ain, publish posts about Islamic scholars' opposing stance on the issue, as exemplified as follows:

Post 6.2: *Ain* ["I'm not up for any argument"]

April 16 ·

It's a long write up (by some standard) but read on. Also worth checking: an insight by ustaz in comment section. No, I'm not up for any argument, chill!

i

23,786 Views

Follow

April 15 ·

"As a muslim doctor, what is your stand in vaccine?"

Soalan ini diajukan kepada Dr. Zakir Naik ketika sesi beliau di Besut, beberapa hari lalu. Sekadar untuk memahami konteks, soalan ini adalah soalan ketiga yang ditanya oleh seorang penonton. Dua soalan pertama yang ditanya beliau adalah mengenai isu dimanakah Allah dan juga mengenai Wahabi.

Dr Zakir Naik mengambil masa yang relatively lebih panjang untuk mengupas dua persoalan pertama. Sudah tentu, kerana dua persoalan ini adalah sangat, sangat sensitif dan luas perbahasannya. Persoalan "dimana Allah" adalah soalan ancient yang sudah wujud sejak zaman salaf lagi. Manakala soalan "Wahabi" pula walaupun lebih kontemporari, tetapi kita sendiri faham ianya bukan semudah boleh dijawab dengan sebaris dua.

Hanya selepas menjawab dua soalan pertama, barulah Dr Zakir Naik menjawab soalan mengenai vaksin ini. Walaupun topik vaksin tidak kurang hebat kontroversinya, namun disebabkan keterbatasan masa, beliau cuma mengambil masa 44 saat sahaja untuk menjawabnya!

Walaupun ringkas, namun jawapan beliau adalah sangat basic dan tepat pada prinsip. "If you use a drug, even though it contains alcohol or something which is haram, and if that drug is the only drug that can save you, it is permitted in Islam."

Dr Zakir Naik tidak terus menjawab boleh atau tidak. Sebaliknya beliau menyatakan dengan tuntas mengenai prinsip yang perlu digunapakai agar kita memahami bagaimana kedudukan kita apabila berada di situasi tersebut.

Namun malangnya, walaupun hanya beberapa hari berlalu, ada pihak yang anti-vaksin mula menggunakan video Dr Zakir Naik ini kononnya menjadi dalil bahawa "DZN sendiri kata vaksin tak wajib, malah mengatakan haram kerana vaksin bukannya darurat dan diperbuat dari benda haram!"

***

Justeru kepada sesiapa yang masih ragu-ragu, seperti yang saya sebutkan, anda bukan ada masalah dengan kami para doktor/petugas kesihatan. Tapi anda ada masalah dengan JAKIM. Sila setelkan kekeliruan anda di sana.

Contohnya, fatwa mengenai vaksin oleh mufti ini. Anda tak bersetuju dengan fatwa ini? Sila pergi jumpa mufti ini sendiri, jangan tanya saya.

http://muftiwp.gov.my/index.php...

Like Comment Share

and 4 others

As shown in Post 6.2, Ain only writes three sentences that relate to the very lengthy (about 10 times longer than is reproduced here) public Facebook post about the permissibility of vaccination in Islam. Here, I will only analyse Ain's own caption and its relation to the content of the original post she shared on April 16, 2016. The summarised translation of the original post is as follows:

> The original post contains information about the time a person asked this question to a popular (yet controversial) Islamic scholar Dr Zakir Naik: "As a Muslim doctor, what is your stand in vaccine?" The commentary of the scholar's reply was pages long. But the scholar's exact reply was succinct – "If you use a drug, even though it contains alcohol or something which is *haram* (forbidden in Islam), and if that drug is the only drug that can save you, it is permitted in Islam". The writer of the original post (understandably a medical doctor) applauded the scholar's diplomatic answer but condemned how others have manipulated the answer to justify their decision not to vaccinate their children by claiming that the scholar said that vaccination is not 'compulsory' in Islam. The doctor sarcastically asked anti-vaccination parents to not argue with doctors (for their clear stand for vaccination) but to refer to the Islamic authority body in Malaysia whose *Muftis* (appointed Islamic scholars for each state in Malaysia) have already ascertained that vaccination is permissible in Islam (regardless of its contents) for prevention of deadly illnesses (the information can be accessed by readers via the url link at the very end).

In the very first sentence in Ain's caption, despite acknowledging the lengthy nature of the original post, she includes the imperative phrase "*but read on*" to highlight the importance of the content. In the second sentence, she directs those who read her post to the comment section of the original post in which there is an "*insight*" which is "*worth-checking*" by a particular "*ustaz [a male religious scholar]*". Although she encourages her readers to read the opinions written by *authorised* people in medical and religious fields who are pro-vaccination, she provides a 'disclaimer' with a clear disagreement marker "*no*", ending with an exclamation mark that she is "*not up for any argument*". This *denotes* her unwillingness to be involved in any controversial dispute.

Connotatively, it must be first noted that Ain's Muslim identity is *indexed* rather differently in this post because indirectly she visually portrays her religious identity through her profile picture, which is publicly visible in the small visual thumbnail

(partly concealed to protect her anonymity). In her daily life and in pictures on Facebook, Ain wears a 'hijab' (head scarf) and a '*niqab'* (half-faced cover), both of which are associated with female Muslim dress. With this image and her instruction to read the opinions from both medical and religious perspectives, she reinforces her portrayal of self as not only a Muslim but also a well-informed mother who is pro-vaccination after having considered both of these important aspects in her life. In this way, she *positions* herself as a 'better' mother in *comparison* to the hypothetical others who may have made their decision by considering only one of these perspectives. The last part of her caption is interesting because despite seemingly trying to avoid arguments, she uses the voices of '*authorities*' to represent and substantiate her own similar stance on the issue. This way of constructing identities can be interpreted in two ways: (1) as a diplomatic way to save herself from dispute that typically arises from such a divisive topic – avoiding *powerlessness*; or (2) as a way of constructing a *position* of relative *powerfulness* because of her agency in deciding the focus of her Facebook post – by channelling readers' attention to the pro-vaccination view. Overall, the analysis of Post 6.2 represents the increasingly contentious issue of 'pro-vaccination versus anti-vaccination' among the Muslim participants that is particularly apparent in the realm of social media. Such a post demonstrates just one of the many ways in which some Muslim participants, and Muslim mothers in general, depict vaccination as being both a matter of medical responsibility towards a child and a matter of spiritual responsibility towards God.

We now move on to analyse excerpts that reveal participants orienting positively to the discourse of spirituality when expressing their beliefs and experiences of motherhood. Tasha, for example, explicitly constructs a religious identity when explaining how her faith positively affects her motherhood. A few turns before the following conversation, Tasha criticised mothers who blindly followed certain trends in motherhood with no basis in the Quran. After being asked if religious values made a big impact on her mothering decisions, she agreed and elaborated as follows:

Excerpt 6.6 (a): *Tasha* ["I don't look religious"]

Turn	Speaker	Transcript
1790.	T	For me, I don't look religious (laughs).
1791.	R	Ok.
1792.	T	But I am very spiritual.
1793.	R	Ouh, haa.
1794.	T	For me, from the start erm I waktu I pregnant N pun memang I start baca Quran semua. Erm even like sekarang I try to jaga my sembahyang semua. *[...erm when I was pregnant with N too I had in fact started reading the Quran and all. ..like now I try to take care of my daily prayers].*
1795.	R	Ha ah.
1796.	T	So things like this because macam you can doa for protection semua but then it's Him yang jaga properly. *[...because like you can pray for protection and all but then it's Him who properly protects].*
1797.	R	Ya lah. Ha ah.
1798.	T	So erm I believe in evil eye.
1799.	R	Ha ah.
1800.	T	So macam menda gini we try to buang takleh kena kat baby. *[So things like this we try to get rid off cannot get to baby].*
1801.	R	Ha ah.
1802.	T	Because kesian kalau baby kena, sakit lah apa semua. *[Because pity the baby if the gets it, s/he will be sick and all].* (23 turns omitted)
1826.	T	So I'm very spiritual so I want Ali to be like that as well when he grows up because the best relationship is with God. Tu lah I nak dia believe in that thing. *[... God. That's what I want him to believe in that thing].*
1827.	R	Yelah. But your definition would be yes is it? Since you chose to do that?
1828.	T	I I for me yes. For me macam.
1829.	R	To be a good mother?
1830.	T	Yeah you need to be spiritual.
1831.	R	For you. Haa.
1832.	T	Because kalau you tak spiritual, senang gila you macam rasa down semua. *[Because if you're not spiritual, it's crazily easy for you to feel down and all].*

At the *denotative* level, Tasha elaborates the significance of her religious belief in different aspects of her life. This is evidenced through superlatives, temporal and conditional structures, and pronouns. First, it is interesting to note her clarification at the very beginning that she is "*very spiritual*" despite not appearing religious, with some laughter in turn 1792 to underscore the fact that Islam is a highly significant yet less visible marker of her identity as a mother. I can understand Tasha's need to clarify this to me (a Muslim mother wearing the hijab) since she does not typically don the hijab and, thus arguably, physically portrays less of an 'Islamic' identity. The repeated use of the superlative adverb "*very*" and adjective "*best*" in turn 1826 further

intensifies her explicit description of herself as "*spiritual*" in her relationship with God. Throughout Excerpt 6.6 (a), Tasha advocates that a 'good' mother needs to be spiritual in increasingly explicit ways. She uses several temporal expressions that indicate the past - "*from the start*" (turn 1794) - and the present - "*like sekarang [like now]*" (turn 1794) - to show her ongoing efforts to improve her Islamic practices so that her son is protected by God. She also makes reference to the future in turn 1826 when she mentions, "*I want Ali to be like that as well when he grows up*" to imply how such practices will enable her to be a good role model for Ali, her son. She also expresses her sense of protectiveness through the use of the conditional structure in turn 1802 to show the importance of trying her best to protect her child from sickness which may come from the "*evil eye*" (turn 1798) (which is a repeated phrase). In the omitted turns, despite elaborating on the importance of observing Islamic practices, she suggests that a 'good' mother does not necessarily have to do all that. In turn 1827, I ask if being spiritual constitutes her idea of a 'good' mother. That is when she agrees by repeating "*for me*" twice in turn 1828 to reiterate that it is simply her personal opinion. Tasha uses the pronoun "*you*" instead of "*I*" to express her personal opinion in turns 1830 and 1832, which is followed by the verb "*need*". She can be seen to be using another conditional structure here to highlight that new mothers can easily feel down if they are not spiritual.

About 500 turns later, Tasha again draws heavily on the discourse of spirituality, but more specifically the discourse of Islamic religion, when I ask if she strives to become a 'better' mother in the future. She then responds as follows:

Excerpt 6.6 (b): *Tasha* ["I want to be…more religious"]

Turn	Speaker	Transcript
2307.	T	Err I want to be like macam more religious. Because I think kalau kalau a mother yang religious is more disciplined to the anak. … *[…Because I think if if a mother is religious is more disciplined towards the child].*
2308.	R	Ouhh.
2309.	T	I think kalau budak lagi Islamic, they are very religious, they they are very disciplined lagi. Because for me, disiplin penting. Because I want my kids to grow up like us as well. *[I think if kids, more Islamic, they are very religious, they they are very disciplined. Because for me, discipline is important. Because…].*
2310.	R	Ha ah.
2311.	T	Disiplin penting. So I don't want my anak nanti jadi kurang ajar ke apa semua. At least jadi manusia lah. Kalau keluar orang takut memang manusia (laughs). *[Discipline is important. So I don't want my child later to become rude and all. At least become human beings lah. If go out people are afraid, then humans (laughs)].* (6 turns omitted)
2318.	R	You change yourself ke ke you nak instill religious values only to your kids ke atau semua-semua lah? *[You change yourself or or you want to instil religious….kids or or everything lah?].*
2319.	T	I want to change myself. We want to change ourself and we want to instill the value good values to our anak. I rasa macam tu. *[…good values to our child. I think (it's) like that].*
2320.	R	Haa.
2321.	T	Because tu yang paling penting in in life. *[Because that's the most important thing in life].*
2322.	R	Ha ah.
2323.	T	I want him to know that bukan material things. Menda tu yang paling penting. *[I want him to know that not just material things. That thing is the most important].*

Denotatively, Tasha uses several discursive features like conditional structures, the consistent use of one type of verb, humour, changing use of pronouns, and superlatives to underscore her belief that being religious can lead one to be a 'good' parent and/or a child. In her conditional sentences in turns 2307 and 2309, Tasha makes repeated links between being "*religious/Islamic*" and being "*disciplined*", both of which refer to herself as a mother and to the person she wishes her son to be. The noun "*disiplin [discipline]*" is also repeatedly mentioned along with the adjective "*penting [important]*" in turns 2309 and 2311. She also uses the verb "*want*" repeatedly in Excerpt 7.5 (b) in almost all her turns in the excerpt to highlight her desire to raise child(ren) to have good values. In the last sentence in turn 2311, Tasha also expresses

her hope that her son will "*at least jadi manusia lah [at least become human beings lah]*", to humourously imply that one who does not have discipline and manners can be likened to an animal. In terms of the choice of pronoun, Tasha consistently uses the first-person singular pronoun "*I*" in almost all utterances except the second sentence in turn 2319, in which she uses "*we*". The first-person plural pronoun is used to refer to both herself and her husband. Tasha continues to use more superlative structures in this excerpt such as the adverb "*very*" in turn 2309 and "*paling penting [the most important]*" in turns 2321 and 2323 to emphasise the importance of religion in their lives.

At the *connotative* level, Tasha's overt use of adjectives and nouns characteristic of Islam in the two excerpts *indexes* her strong sense of Muslim identity. Despite openly admitting that she does not look "*religious*", Tasha implicitly portrays herself in increasingly "*religious*" ways based on the qualities she wants to inculcate in her child and herself. Tasha *positions* herself assertively as a Muslim mother with her use of superlative and conditional structures, including humour, to highlight the importance of instilling Islamic values in her children. The use of the temporal structures underscores her ongoing quest to be a 'better' mother in terms of ensuring her son's protection and becoming a 'good' role model for him. The various ways Tasha and many other participants orient to different temporal realms in their utterances will be discussed later in Chapter 7 (see section 7.4.2). Furthermore, through the use of impersonal pronouns when expressing her personal opinions in Excerpt 6.6 (a), Tasha seems to make her opinion relatable not only to the community of Muslim mothers but more widely to mothers who are believers of any religions. The swift change of pronoun from the consistent singular first-person to the collective plural pronoun in Excerpt 6.6 (b), along with the repeated use of the verb "*want*", shows that Tasha mainly portrays herself as the main parent, despite implying that she and her husband parent collaboratively. In this way, she constructs herself in a *position* of *relative powerfulness* in *relation* to her husband. This reinforces the hegemonic discourses of parenthood in which the mother typically assumes the primary *position* as a parent (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Schippers, 2007). Through these discursive features, along with the consistent focus on being spiritual as a parent, Tasha depicts herself as a 'good' mother (and her and her husband as 'good' parents), trying to prioritise their child's needs.

The last excerpt to be analysed further exemplifies the way a participant positively orients to religious discourse when talking about motherhood. This is different, however, because the following is the only excerpt in this section (section 6.3) featuring a Christian mother, Cathy. The discourse of spirituality is largely absent in the interviews with non-Muslim participants in the study (Cathy is the only non-Muslim who draws on this discourse). Excerpt 6.7, therefore, represents one of only few examples in the dataset whereby a non-Muslim participant shows a clear orientation to religion. Cathy's responses below follow a general question early in the interview, "*What are the best things about becoming a mother?*".

Excerpt 6.7: *Cathy* ["I believe in God"]

Turn	Speaker	Transcript
84.	C	Um, basically, I I learnt...more about uh, being a parent.
85.	R	Hm.
86.	C	Yeah, like um (coughs) um not sure uh how to say this, um, maybe, um, I I'm a Christian.
87.	R	Uh hm.
88.	C	Yeah so I I believe in God.
89.	R	Uh hm.
90.	C	so you you know how God uh created human beings, because He wanted to have a a relationship, want to, because of love?
91.	R	Hmm.
92.	C	And you you know how human beings they always do...we, we always fall short and we sin and we do things that we shouldn't be doing and all that?
93.	R	Ah hm.
94.	C	And to know that, (coughs) um God still loves us? It is, it is something that uh I can only fully understand when I, uh, become a mother.
95.	R	Ahhhh.
96.	C	and you know, you know you you know how you you love your son.
97.	R	Hm.
98.	C	and your your your children, and then, uh you know like regardless what happens.
99.	R	Hmm.
100.	C	you will still love him, anyway?
101.	R	Okay (laughs).
102.	C	and uh you just want to have that uh relationship with him.
103.	R	Uh huhh.
104.	C	you want the best for him, and
105.	R	Uh huh.
106.	C	you know somehow that that helps me understand better like how uh God look at us, at His, uh so precious to Him, yeah.
107.	R	Aaaa.
108.	C	So, I I I think, I I, understood that aspect of my uh faith, uh my religion, uh when I have my uh, my son.
		(13 turns omitted)
122.	C	No not to say a lot different lah just, uh help me to understand
123.	R	Uh hm.
124.	C	God's love better, yeah.

Denotatively, by explicitly quoting her religion and using different nouns and pronouns to refer to people and God, analogy and some rhetorical questions, Cathy explains that being a mother has helped her to better understand God's love. Cathy expressly proclaims her religious identity by stating that she is a "*Christian*" (turn 86), though in a tone that is almost apologetic as implied by her hesitations "*um not sure uh how to say this, um, maybe, um, I, I*" within the same turn. This tone is very much different from the ways the other Muslim participants *index* their religious identity when talking to me. Nouns like "*God*" (turns 88, 90, 94, 106, 124), "*religion*" (turn

108), and "*faith*" (turn 108) as well as pronouns like "*His*" and "*Him*" in turn 106 indicate that she believes in her religion. To refer to herself, she mostly uses the first-person pronoun "*I*". She can also be seen to closely identify with her parenting role through the use of words like "*parent*" (turn 84) and "*mother*" (turn 94). To refer to other people, Cathy is first seen to use the distant plural pronoun "*they*" (turn 92) to refer to human beings in general but she quickly shifts to using the collective pronoun "*we*" (turn 92) and "*us*" (turns 94, 106). Such a change along with the distant second-person pronoun "*you*" (turns 96 to 106) and rhetorical questions like "*you know…?*" (turns 90, 96, 98 and 106), "*God still loves us?*" (turn 94) and "*will still love him, anyway?*" (turn 100) can be *denoted* as her attempts to elicit agreement from me. When talking about her faith as a Christian, Cathy uses comparative adjectives like "*more*" (turn 84) and "*better*" (turns 106 and 124), and positive nouns and adjectives such as "*love*" (turns 90, 100, 124) and "*precious*" (turn 106) to highlight the improvement being a mother has brought to her understanding of her faith. The excerpt provides an analogy to demonstrate the *similarity* between God's love (the relationship she has with God) and the love of a mother (her relationship with her son).

Connotatively, compared to other Muslim participants whose excerpts we have analysed so far, Cathy more explicitly *indexes* her religious identity through the overt mentioning of her religion along with other nouns and pronouns characteristic of Christianity. The positive words she uses (e.g. "*love*" and "*precious*"), along with the comparative adjectives (e.g. "*more*", "*better*"), and the analogy to exemplify her better understanding of God's love further reinforce the *positioning* of herself as a better Christian in *relation* to her old self before becoming a mother. Unlike many other participants who tend to *position* themselves as a 'good' mother in *relation* to other mothers and specific practices of motherhood, Cathy constructs her identity as a 'good' mother in a more intrinsic and personal sense, as one who has unconditional love towards her son – just as unconditional as God's love is towards His believers. Intrinsic constructions of identities among the Muslim participants, though not as commonly found, are present. In Sarah's interview, for instance, she expresses concerns about becoming a 'good' mother "*in Allah's [God's] book*", not in "*other people's book*" (turn 1416). Also, it is interesting to note that Cathy's shifting use of pronouns from singular to collective possibly points to the construction of a shared identity with myself (as both of us are people of faith). Overall, Cathy portrays herself

as a Christian mother whose religion strongly influences her perception of her motherhood, just like the Muslim participants in this study.

6.4 Conclusion

In this final section, the central arguments pertaining to the construction of identities in relation to heterogeneous ethnicities and religions are summarised by addressing the research questions outlined at the beginning of the chapter.

1b: What identities do the participants construct when they communicate about motherhood in relation to the discourses of ethnicity and religion in Malaysia?

The participants are found to portray themselves as and their ideas about the 'good' mother in close relation to their own and others' ethnicities and religions. For example, it was shown in section 7.3 that the majority of participants construct themselves as Muslims (and Cathy as a Christian) in close relation to their 'good' mother identities. The participants' ethnic and religious identities are found to be inextricably linked, which may be because of the normative association between certain ethnic groups in Malaysia and certain religions (Siddique, 1981. Also see section 1.3). Another observation is that, alongside their religious and ethnic identities, some participants also often simultaneously construct their identities as Malaysians. The constructions of national identities are not found to be constructed when the participants draw on the discourses of career relations, possibly because ethnicity-related and religious discourses are more closely related to and powerfully shaped by (and shaping) the demographics of Malaysia.

Ethnic and religious identities do not often appear to intersect with gendered identities, in comparison to the career-related discourses in the previous chapter. The only exceptions are Kiran, Tasha, Ain and Dyana, with the first two largely reinforcing the construction of the mother as the main (or even the 'only') parent and the latter mostly challenging the hegemonic discourse of parenthood by constructing the identities of collaborative parents (Schippers, 2007). The construction of the *relatively* more *powerful* and/or *powerless* identity *positions* (Baxter, 2007; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) is prevalent in this chapter, probably because the religious discourses the participants

draw on are often accompanied by a sense of judgment and prescriptivism regarding the 'right' thing to do.

2b: How do the participants construct and negotiate their identities within the intersecting discourses of motherhood, ethnicity and religion in Malaysia?

In terms of the ways the participants construct their identities, I would reiterate that the overt mentioning of religious identities does not suggest a static association with any particular identity, but rather signifies a much bigger picture.

At the *denotative* level (Baxter, 2007), many of the participants employ various discursive features to convey the challenges of motherhood in relation to their respective ethnic and religious backgrounds. One of the key discursive features the participants use to highlight their *different positioning* and the *relationships* involved is by using different types of pronouns (e.g. personal, generic, singular, plural) to highlight their *similarities* and *differences* as well as individual and collective struggles within and across ethnicity-related and religious discourses (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). This may also be interpreted as an attempt to counter prevailing 'misleading' parenting practices often attached to specific ethnic and/or religious groups. Besides pronouns, the various sentence structures employed (negative and conditional statements, rhetorical questions) and even some non-linguistic features (such as laughter) are generally used to justify, reinforce and/or challenge their own and others' parenting choices and the dilemmas that relate to ethnicity and religion. In the construction of certain identities that relate to the *powerfulness-powerlessness* continuum by Baxter (2007), the participants use different pronouns to simultaneously construct *differen*t *positions* of relative *powerlessness* and *powerfulness* relating to parenting choices that clash with certain cultural and religious expectations in Malaysia. Many participants *position* themselves as *relatively powerful* when they critically question other mothers' ethnicity-related and/or religious reasoning that is not backed by research in their important parenting decisions (like breastfeeding and vaccination).

The *connotative* analysis of the selected data in this chapter reveals the salience of the *indexicality* principle (Baxter, 2007; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), compared to previous

analysis chapters. This is seen in the participants' relatively explicit identification of self with their ethnic and religious backgrounds. The overt constructions of ethnic and religious identities *index* that judgment of the 'good' mother is strongly related to what participants think should or should not be practised by mothers in specific contexts. The processes through which multiple identities are implicitly constructed are unpacked through the *positionality* and *relationality* principles (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Identity construction is context-dependent, and the contexts of the collected data are important to note (e.g. interview/social media data, interview questions, interview setting, nature of relationship with the researcher, and so forth). In terms of the Facebook posts analysed in this chapter, the participants are found to use the platform not only to share the voices and challenges of mothers from specific ethnic and religious backgrounds (e.g. the voices of a Malay Muslim mother), but also to influence the beliefs and practices of other parents on contentious issues in motherhood (e.g. vaccination). This is a powerful way to reinforce and/or challenge what is considered normative within the specific ethnicity-related and religious communities of Malaysian mothers.

In addition, participants construct multiple identities when talking about both their positive experiences and challenges in motherhood as relating to ethnicity and religion. It is observed that ethnic and religious identities are found to be constructed more often when the participants talk about the 'challenges' of being a mother. The constructions of gendered identities (e.g. the mother as the main or the only parent), though not so prevalent in this chapter, still show complex intersections with ethnic and religious identities and further reinforce the normative idea that women take on main childcare responsibilities within a family (Schippers, 2007). Regardless of whether these multiple identities are constructed explicitly or implicitly, they oftentimes simultaneously draw on various discourses within the intersecting major themes of 'judgments' (by referencing the discourse of 'good' motherhood), 'responsibility', 'challenges' and 'familial and societal roles'.

In terms of wider demographic settings, unlike other research on motherhood discourses which predominantly involve American, Australasian and European mothers (Kinloch, 2018; Mackenzie, 2017; Zappavigna & Zhao, 2017), most of the participants in this study explicitly and/or implicitly indicate their respective

ethnicities and religions within their talk and/or social media posts. In addition, even though certain participants appeal to wider discourses beyond Malaysia to strengthen their opinions (e.g. Tasha quoting the 'Caucasians', Ain quoting Dr. Zakir Naik's opinions on vaccination, or Qisya quoting the purported story of Prophet Musa), participants largely construct their ethnic and religious identities within the specific region of Malaysia. This shows how certain participants highlight both the *similarities* as well as the *distinctiveness* of multiple competing discourses of motherhood in Malaysia. Furthermore, those with different demographic identities to me are seen to be more 'explanatory' and construct the identity of the 'other' to highlight their *differences* as well as our few *similar* collective identities. The inclusion of social media data can be seen to provide a more 'objective' way of looking at how identities are constructed in ethnicity-related and religious discourses in relation to wider and more public 'audiences'.

All in all, the participants are found to be discursively constructing multiple interrelated 'good' mother identities by drawing on the numerous and sometimes competing ethnicity-related and religious discourses that are pertinent within the context of Malaysia.

Chapter 7: Discussion – Unpacking the complexities of identity construction in motherhood

7.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of the study, as laid out in the previous three chapters, in order to illuminate the contributions this study makes in relation to the research questions and relevant literature. The main focus of this chapter is the study's theoretical contributions – the significance of bringing together different elements in the analytical framework to better understand the processes of discursively constructing identities of motherhood, as illustrated in the dataset.

This study has drawn on a combination of discourse analytical approaches, from the perspective of theories of sociocultural linguistic identity (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), feminist poststructuralism (Baxter, 2007) and hegemonic femininities (Schippers, 2007), to explore how the selected participants in this study discursively construct and negotiate their identities. This study is conducted on the basis that there is limited discourse analytic research considering how identities are constructed in the arguably challenging stage of early motherhood, beyond the dominant research contexts of Australasia, Europe and North America. In addressing this research gap, this study utilised data from research interviews with nineteen new mothers in the distinctive sociolinguistic setting of Malaysia, supplemented by data from their social media posts. In the previous three chapters, I have scrutinised selected interview and social media data excerpts through which the interplay of various discourses was explored – from the generic discourses of the ''good' mother' to the more specific discourses that relate to career decisions, ethnicity and religion, in relation to these research questions:

1. What identities do the participants construct in interviews and on social media?

    a. What identities do the participants construct when they communicate about motherhood in relation to their career decisions in Malaysia?

    b. What identities do the participants construct when they communicate about motherhood in relation to the discourses of ethnicity and religion in Malaysia?

2. How are these identities constructed and negotiated in interviews and on social media?

    a. How do the participants construct and negotiate their identities within the intersecting discourses of motherhood and career decisions in Malaysia?

    b. How do the participants construct and negotiate their identities within the intersecting discourses of motherhood, ethnicity and religion in Malaysia?

The following section 7.2 briefly addresses the first set of research questions, whilst the remaining four sections of this chapter focus on the second set of research questions. A summary of the findings, which explicates the general contributions in relation to the distinctive social context of Malaysia, is first provided in section 7.3. Aligned with this study's inductive approach, this sets the foundation on which the emerging central theoretical contributions of the study within the fields of discourse and identity are expounded: (i) the reconceptualisation of 'intertextuality' in identity construction that has been unveiled through the combined textual contexts of research interviews and social media posts; and (ii) explicating the links between the concepts within and across the sub-frameworks in the overall combined analytical framework. In summary, this chapter argues that by examining the ways the selected participants communicated about their motherhood using integrated methods and discourse analytical approaches, a clearer understanding of the processes of discursive identity construction and how they can be analysed comprehensively are gained.

7.2 The identities constructed by the participants

This section addresses the first set of research questions by summarising and discussing the links between the identities that the participants constructed discursively, from those that were more generic to different types of mothers to those that were particularly salient within the diverse Malaysian contexts, as revealed in the three analysis chapters.

The data analysis has shown that the participants in this study constructed multiple and fluid identities that often intersected with one another, a finding that is in keeping with much contemporary discourse analysis research (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006;

Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). In general, the identities constructed by the participants ranged from broader ones like the identities of a parent, a mother or a 'good' mother, to more specific evaluative identities such as a 'good' working mother (WM), a *relatively* 'better' stay at home mother (SAHM), and a 'great' protective and well-informed Muslim mother.

Echoing studies which assert the pervasive role of 'gender differentiation' and 'gendered parenthood' discourses in fixing individuals in binary and gendered subject positions, this study has argued that the participants in this study could not entirely escape foregrounding their identities through the parental, gendered and heteronormative identities of 'parents' and 'mothers' (Baxter, 2007; Litosseliti, 2006; Mackenzie, 2016). The data suggested that the construction of these generic identities was prevalent, despite some participants' attempts to detach themselves temporarily from these labels (see Excerpts 4.6 and Post 4.4). In relation to the ten major themes that emerged from the data (see Table 4.1 and Appendix 3), the participants' identities as 'mothers' have been shown to intersect with other identities that were constructed *in* and *through* these interrelated themes, reflecting existing understandings of identity and intertextuality (Baxter, 2007; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Werbner, 2010). More importantly, the identities constructed also revolved around predominantly evaluative identities. As has been exemplified earlier, such identities were often discursively realised in relation to various versions of 'good' (and 'bad') motherhood. This observation is unsurprising since the ''good' mother' was found to be the most frequently-coded subordinate theme within the most frequently-coded superordinate theme of 'judgments and views' (see Table 4.1 and Appendix 3). This finding points to the salience of 'normativity', which is regarded as "the very essence of an ideology" (Gubrium & Holstein, 1990, as cited in Perälä-Littunen, 2004, p. 26), and more specifically, the 'normative' discourse of motherhood. The 'good' mother, for example, was seen to be the normative construct that all participants tended to orient to and evaluate themselves against (Tangir, Cohen & Peled, 2017).

When the specific discourses used by the participants were examined, the evaluative identities constructed, however, were found to differ in certain ways from findings in existing literature on motherhood discourses emanating from Australasia, Europe and North America. One the one hand, my research has shown that the 'good' mother

identities constructed by my participants through the major themes of 'changes', 'judgments and views', 'positivity', 'challenges', 'responsibility', and 'familial and societal roles' were generally in line with the ways the 'good' mother has been constructed in most scholarly work on motherhood discourses in dominant research contexts (Mackenzie, 2016; Zappavigna & Zhao, 2017; Zhao et al., 2008). For example, this study has found the constructions of arguably universal and normative identities of motherhood such as a 'good' breastfeeding mother, a guilt-ridden mother, a sceptical mother and an overwhelmed mother (see all analysis chapters, especially Chapter 4). On the other hand, the 'good' mother identities constructed through the overlapping themes of 'relations to career', 'ethnicity and culture', 'spirituality', and 'technology and social media' turned out to be starkly different from what has been found in previous studies. For instance, a combination of the career-, ethnicity- and religion-specific constructions of identities, such as a Muslim WAHM and a Bumiputera Malaysian mother, as shown in Chapters 5 and 6, have not been identified in previous related research. This may be because none of the mothers in other research contexts made specific reference to their ethnicity or religion. This observation provides evidence that the participants were engaged with multiple complementary and competing motherhood discourses that so far have appeared to be unique to Malaysia. The ways that the participants distinctively engaged with these discourses are explained in the ensuing section.

Essentially, this general observation has shown that the identities constructed by the participants were not only parental, gendered, intersecting and evaluative in nature, but they were also culturally distinctive. This study has, thus, reinforced the general claim that the notion of 'good' motherhood is context-specific across sociocultural settings (Porter & Kelso, 2008; Smyth, 2012), and the study has revealed how socioeconomically- *and* socioculturally-imbued 'good' mother identities can be. As such, the findings in this study also contribute towards conceptualisations of what ''good' motherhood' may entail beyond the dominant research contexts in the existing literature. This outcome provides further justifications for having focused the analysis in Chapters 5 and 6 on the themes of career decisions, ethnicities and religions, as well as supplementing the arguments with relevant social media posts.

7.3 Constructing identities within the social context of Malaysia

This section begins to address the second set of research questions. Firstly, the findings are discussed in relation to the under-researched context of Malaysia, thus highlighting the salience of 'geographical spatiality' in identity construction. Based on the findings, I will discuss how researching this specific group of women from Malaysia can enrich our existing understanding of the processes of identity construction. Similar to the intersecting socioeconomic and sociocultural discourses (e.g. career relations, ethnicity, religion) discussed above, through which participants constructed their identities, the ways they drew on and oriented to these discourses when communicating about motherhood were rather distinctive. Many participants were found to be conforming to, challenging and ambivalently responding to the various 'good' motherhood discourses in ways that appeared to be specific to the Malaysian context at various *local*, *regional* and *global* levels (Schippers, 2007). Moreover, the intersubjective constructions of multiple evaluative identities were more readily observed in Chapters 5 and 6, thus revealing the salience of certain demography-related discourses like career roles, ethnicity and religion that were specific to the Malaysian settings. I shall, therefore, discuss the ways the participants constructed their 'good' mother identities by looking at how they oriented to: (i) socioeconomic factors in Malaysia, such as the discourses of career relations; and (ii) sociocultural elements, such as the discourses of ethnicity and religion.

Relating to the socioeconomic factors in Malaysia, as demonstrated in Chapter 5, participants often, explicitly and implicitly, related their notions of 'good' motherhood to the various career options available to mothers in Malaysian society (WM, WAHM or SAHM). Conflicting ideas about these career options in relation to the notion of 'good' motherhood have already been researched. Indeed, women regularly face conflict when it comes to career decisions and motherhood (Bailey, 2000; Duberley & Carrigan, 2012; Morehead, 2001). What has emerged as different in this study, however, is that the participants' competing ideas of *hegemonic* career options in Malaysia were evidently linked to the socioeconomic status of Malaysia as a developing nation as well as its interrelated sociocultural influences. In such a social context, many women are torn between sustaining motherhood practices that conform to competing motherhood discourses and venturing into the workforce to contribute to the financial stability of the family and society. In the analysis, we have seen WMs

who encountered difficulties in their aspirations to simultaneously perform as a worker and a mother (Smyth, 2012) in their quest to be perceived as a 'good' mother. They often constructed themselves as being 'trapped' within highly gendered expectations that reinforce women's subordinate *position* in *relation* to *hegemonic* masculinities, which serve the interests of *local*, *regional* and *global* gender orders (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Schippers, 2007) (see Lippy Morgan – Excerpts 5.3, Post 5.2 and Post 5.2).

Because career-decisions in Malaysia are socioeconomically and socioculturally influenced, the intersections between the *local* and/or *regional* discourses and the *global* discourses related to careers are rather erratic. Being a SAHM in Malaysia, for example, has been described as in line with the religious duties of a mother within Malaysia's largely patriarchal family system (see Excerpts 5.1, Excerpt 5.4 and Excerpts 5.6), but the decision has also been expressed as a dominant discourse from the 'West' (Excerpt 5.1 (b)). At the other end of the continuum, becoming a WM is seen as a challenge to the dominant discourse of 'intensive mothering' originating in Australasia, Europe and North America. However, being a WM has also been described as the *hegemonic* form of motherhood, i.e. the new 'norm', in certain *localised* and *regional* communities in Malaysia today (see Excerpt 5.1 (b) and Excerpt 5.2). This attitude towards WMs places some pressure on SAHMs. This shows that the participants displayed various inter-discursive and inter-cultural ways of constructing their career-related 'good' mother identities. Furthermore, a look at the different career-role categories has revealed the different ways the participants *positioned* themselves and were positioned in *relation* to the categories: as an out-group in *relation* to others who had *different* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) mothering beliefs and/or practices (see Excerpts 5.1 and Excerpts 5.6); and as a relatively internal struggle in *relation* to oneself (see Post 5.1, Excerpts 5.3 and Excerpt 5.5). Also, the internal conflict faced by the participants across career categories in this study has challenged existing scholarly work that constructed guilt in motherhood as exclusively affecting WMs (Goodwin & Huppatz, 2010; Smyth, 2012) (see Excerpts 5.1, Excerpt 5.2, Excerpt 5.4, Excerpts 5.6 and Post 5.3). Despite the career categories often being drawn as inter-group conflicts, certain participants were found to assertively *position* themselves as mothers who challenged normative associations between certain career roles and the ideal 'good' mother (see Excerpts 5.7 and Post 5.4). These contesting views, nonetheless, have revealed the participants' aspirations to prioritise their

children's best interests from the perspectives of their own *local* and *regional* values as well as *global* wellbeing, all of which were deemed important in different ways.

Secondly, the above findings have shown how the participants drew on, oriented to, reinforced and challenged the complex ideas of 'good' motherhood in *relation* to the discourses of ethnicity and religion in Malaysia, thereby establishing their distinctive ethnic and religious identities (see Chapter 6). I claim this finding to be the most unique to this study, because none of the mothers featured in existing research on motherhood discourses - conducted in Australasia, Europe and North America - quoted their ethnicity or religion as contributing to their motherhood beliefs and practices (Mackenzie, 2016; Mackenzie, 2018, Zappavigna & Zhao, 2017; Zhao et al., 2008). On the contrary, we have seen the many ways in which certain participants in this study insistently challenged and navigated dominant motherhood discourses in relation to specific ethnicity-related traditions and religion at *local* and *regional* levels, which may come into conflict with discourses which circulate on a wider *global* level. For example, certain participants portrayed their adherence to and pressures to conform to the more *local* and *regional* ethnicity-related discourses of traditional confinement practices, when they actually conflicted with more 'modern' medically-informed practices at the *global* level – those that are adopted by mothers from many other parts of the world, and in particular, influential techno-rational discourses – emanating from Australasia, Europe and North America (see section 6.2). Through the discourses of religion, many participants constructed a critical *position* from which they often *delegitimised* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) others' views and/or practices of motherhood (see Excerpt 6.4). Also, the construction of 'good' mother identities through religion has shown how certain ethnic and religious identities (e.g. 'Malay Muslim') were constructed simultaneously in interactions, reflecting the unique yet rather 'non-negotiable' nature of some demographic identities in Malaysia (Siddique, 1981) (see examples of data from Malay Muslims in Chapter 6. Also see Appendix 3).

More distinctively, I have illustrated how certain participants reinforced the construction of their 'good' mother and religious identities when justifying their mothering opinions by *relating* them to the ultimate and unquestionable *authority*, i.e. God and/or the Quran (which represents stories and commands from God) (see Excerpts 6.4 and Excerpt 6.7). This is in comparison to participants who only *related*

their mothering opinions to themselves or other people. The discussions about vaccination (see Excerpt 6.5 and Post 6.2) have exemplified the ways in which some Muslim participants considered certain parenting practices to be both a matter of medical responsibility towards a child and also a matter of spiritual responsibility towards God. This shows how religious identities were constructed by the participants as important and sometimes took precedence over other identities. Such religious constructions of identities were often manifested through the use of Arabic expressions (see Post 5.2 and Post 5.3), which *indexed* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) their Muslim identity and reinforced their portrayal as 'good' mothers, sometimes even shifting the credit for 'good' motherhood solely onto God. With regard to participants' use of certain culturally-specific words, many used a combination of English, Malay Tamil and Arabic terms to portray themselves (and myself as the researcher) as Malaysians. The participants' use of 'Manglish', a variety of English widely spoken in Malaysia, also constructed a Malaysian identity because the language variety consists of words that exist in the English language but with possibly different connotations, grammatical structures and words borrowed from other *local* languages in Malaysia (Baskaran, 1987) (see Eva – Excerpt 4.5 (a)). These observations reflect the way people construct their cultural identities using specific linguistic resources (Baran, 2018). Unlike American, Australasian and European mothers portrayed in existing literature, this study has shown a number of challenges that Malaysian mothers faced in their identity constructions: choosing ethnicity-related traditions and/or religion over *global* motherhood discourses (see Excerpt 6.2); integrating *local*/*regional* cultures and religions with *global* discourses (see Excerpt 6.3, Excerpts 6.6 and Post 6.2); and even preferring *global* discourses over their own *local* cultures and/or religions (see Excerpt 6.2, Excerpt 6.3 and Excerpt 6.5), as manifested in their views and reported practices of motherhood.

However, such tensions trigger a broader question: to what extent did these specific and salient discourses (i.e. religious, ethnicity-related, career-related, familial and medical discourses) relate to existing scholarly conceptualisations of the larger dominant, *hegemonic* and traditional 'good' motherhood discourses, as well as the *local*, *regional* and *global* levels (Schippers, 2007)? In the construction of the participants' identities, which discourses worked in harmony and which in opposition? Such questions can be addressed by: (a) untangling the discourses located at the

different *local*, *regional* and *global* levels; and (b) exploring the ways the participants *positioned* themselves in relation to these discourses and how they link.

Firstly, I acknowledge that it is difficult to distinguish between and identify specific *local*, *regional* and *global* levels in discourses of motherhood because these levels overlap in different ways, as I shall exemplify shortly. Based on the findings of this research, and in relation to the ways I presupposed the differences between the three levels (see section 3.2 (c)), I now see *local* level discourses as those which are specific and very much dependent on individual participants' specific preferences and circumstances in relation to their immediate social contexts, such as family or peer group. For example, the expectations that a 'good' mother should not judge other mothers (see Bernice – Excerpt 4.8) is a *local* discourse. This opinion was not found in many other participants' utterances. The constructions of identities at the *regional* level, on the other hand, are seen to typically involve distinctive discourses associated with Malaysian, Southeast Asian or Asian social and geographical contexts, or people with *similar* or *different* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) sociocultural backgrounds (e.g. ethnicity and religion) (see Chapters 5 and 6). I observe that some participants drew on discourses simultaneously at both *local* and *regional* levels, and as such, these levels overlapped (see section 6.2). I see motherhood discourses that are located at the *global* level to be more universally-accepted as normative 'good' motherhood ideals, such as the discourse of responsibility which emphasises the importance of prioritising the child's best interests. This discourse relates to many other salient discourses, such as the discourse of career decisions among mothers. That is not to say that all mothers at the *global* level have similar beliefs and practices about what is considered the hegemonic form of motherhood. Such an observation simply reflects that the notion of a global hegemonic discourse of motherhood is more generic than the other two more specific levels, but its meaning is still subjective and contextual in many other ways. Also, I am not asserting that only contemporary discourses operate at the *global* level, as many religious discourses, for example, operate across all three levels because they share *similar* core values (e.g. the same core Islamic teachings for Muslims around the world. See Post 6.1 and Post 6.2). There were, however, instances of such discourses being resisted by certain participants at *local* levels (see Excerpts 4.6 and Excerpts 5.7).

The findings have shown that *local* or *regional* ethnicity-related discourses within Malaysia often worked in *opposition* to dominant *global* 'good' motherhood discourses. This was generally the case even when there were few instances that showed certain participants' advocating the integration of contradicting *local*/*regional* and *global* discourses (see Excerpt 6.2 and Excerpts 6.3). In Excerpt 6.3, for instance, Tasha *positioned* the Malay culture in *opposition* to medical discourses, which, Tasha argued, were often perceived as constituting the 'Caucasian' and thus, more *global* discourses, at least in terms of their hegemony). This observation reflects the construction of the 'otherness' of ethnic groups through the creation of an opposition between 'us' and 'them' (Thomas & Wareing, 1999). Interestingly, however, despite the initial pressures to conform to conflicting motherhood practices, participants who integrated contradicting discourses often *positioned* themselves as relatively *powerful* (Baxter, 2007; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) (see all interview excerpts in section 6.2). These observations show that competing ethnicity-related discourses in discussions of 'good' motherhood were often depicted as 'inter-cultural' conflicts, between the participants' own and others' cultures.

Conversely, when the participants expressed the challenges of motherhood through religious discourses, *local* and *regional* discourses related to the social context of Malaysia intersected and worked in harmony with dominant *global* discourses. For example in Chapter 4, the ability to breastfeed was highlighted by the participants as constituting one of the dominant 'good' motherhood discourses, in line with *global* medical discourses (see Excerpt 4.2). However, in Chapter 6, breastfeeding was described as being in line with religious commands (see Post 6.1 and snippet for Excerpts 6.4). The ways the participants portrayed themselves in this study, therefore, suggests that the discourse of breastfeeding conforms to *local* and *regional* religious discourses in Malaysia, as well as to *global* dominant discourses of motherhood and medicine. The Muslim participants featured in Chapter 6 also negotiated conflicting ideals of motherhood as practised by other mothers. This is typically achieved by *denaturalising* and *delegitimising* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) other mothers who had a *similar* religious background, but had *different* stances and mothering practices (see Excerpts 6.4, Excerpt 6.5 and Post 6.2). This may be the case because devotional teachings within each religion are deemed to be sacred and unchangeable and thus should be observed accordingly, compared to ethnicity-related traditions. This study

has, therefore, exemplified how competing *local*/*regional* and dominant *global* discourses can actually overlap with one another when certain motherhood practices are described and interpreted within specific cultural communities.

Hence, I consider that religious and ethnicity-related discourses create more distinctive identities compared to the more frequently coded career-related discourses. This is because religious and ethnicity-related discourses largely operate at the *local* and *regional* levels within Malaysia, unlike career-related discourses which are more *global.* In fact, the only reason I find some career-related identities to be distinctive is because they were imbued with sociocultural discourses relating to ethnicities and religions in Malaysia. Moreover, career decisions are more of a personal choice whereas religious and ethnicity-related identities are less fluid, tied to texts such as the Quran, and firmly-established customs and traditions. The fluidity and variability of career decisions led many participants to draw on this discourse more frequently to compare themselves with other mothers, leading to more constructions of gendered identities as seen in Chapter 5. The construction of identities in Chapter 6 were arguably more powerful and distinctive because participants showed more conscious and explicit attempts to preserve, integrate and counter beliefs related to *authoritative* religious and ethnicity-related discourses.

In short, the participants' conceptions of and reported practices of 'good' motherhood were regularly linked to the distinctive socioeconomic and sociocultural setting of Malaysia. This study has illustrated the participants' ambivalent *positionings* of self (Parker, 1997) and many types of *relations* within complex and socioculturally-imbued ''good' motherhood' discourses in Malaysia. Many of them, therefore, navigated through competing normative demands of motherhood in distinctively different ways. This understanding is in line with a discourse-based perspective on identity, which has been reviewed in Chapter 2, emphasising the importance of context (Bamberg et al., 2011; Baran, 2018; Gee, 1999; Litosseliti, 2006). These tensions between *local, regional* and *global* discourses of motherhood, thus, contribute to a knowledge of identity construction among mothers across the world, since such issues have rarely been addressed in existing literature on motherhood discourses. Further discussion on the ways the *local, regional* and *global* levels operate in the data is provided in section 7.5.1. The complexities revealed in this study necessitate a scrutiny

of the (inter)textual contexts and analytical concepts to uncover the theoretical contributions in relation to identity construction in the two succeeding sections.

7.4 Constructing identities within the (inter)textual contexts of research interviews and social media platforms

Following a discussion of the significance of the 'geographical spatiality' of Malaysia, this section considers the importance of 'interactional spatiality' in the constructions of identities. Through the analysis, the study has indeed confirmed that identities emerge and circulate *in* and *through* various interrelated discourses (Baxter, 2008; Bucholtz and Hall, 2005; De Fina, 2010; Litosseliti, 2010), and that the participants' motherhood-related identities were discursively constructed, culturally located, overlapping, contradictory, situational, continuously reproduced and redefined (May, 2004, as cited in Benwell & Stokoe, 2006), and subjectively evaluated in complex and dynamic ways instead of existing as *a priori* (Fairclough, 1993). However, even though some scholars highlighted the salience of intertextuality, few had considered intertextualised discourses as comprising textual and temporal contexts, nor if these aspects had any impact on identity construction, especially in relation to motherhood discourses. By discussing the commonalities and discrepancies in the ways identities were constructed across the two different textual contexts used in this study (research interviews and social media posts), this study explores how different modalities assist our understanding of the processes of discursive identity construction, in relation to the stipulated research questions. This part of the discussion will first explicate how the analysis of the two modes of data has contributed to an extended understanding of intertextuality as it relates to identity construction. A discussion of how temporality emerges to constitute a form of intertextuality will later follow.

7.4.1 Positioning and reconceptualising intertextuality, interdiscursivity and power

Before explicating the theoretical contributions of this study in terms of intertextuality, its existing conceptualisation as espoused by FPDA (Baxter, 2007) will be briefly revisited. The principle of intertextuality underscores that "dominant discourses within any speech context are always inflected and inscribed with traces of other discourses" (Baxter, 2007, p. 78). Indeed, this study corroborates this, showing that

dominant and complex discourses of 'good' motherhood, for example, intersect and are inscribed with many other superordinate and subordinate discourses. Despite Eagleton's (1983, as cited in Baxter, 2007) assertion that "all work is intertextual" (p. 78), the understanding and relevance of intertextuality in FPDA has only been illustrated in terms of the analysis of various discourses (addressing the 'what') within one speech context in individual studies, such as spoken discourses (Baxter, 2007) and online forums (Mackenzie, 2016). A factor that has yet to be considered in the literature, but which has been exemplified in this study, is an understanding of intertextuality that encompasses the different speech contexts in which various discourses operate in identity construction. In this study, spoken discourse from research interviews was the primary source of data, supplemented with written and digital discourse collected from social media. This study can, therefore, add to existing literature by illustrating how intertextualised discourses across different modes of communication are salient to our understanding and analysis of identity construction, especially in relation to motherhood discourses. This observation was most clearly seen in the analysis through the identity *relations* within the principle of *relationality*, especially *genuine-artifice* and *authority-delegitimacy* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). These *relations* have revealed *positions* of *powerfulness* and *powerlessness* (Baxter, 2007; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) taken by the participants in various 'intra-textual' and 'inter-textual' contexts.

Across different parts of the research interviews (some of which lasted as long as two hours), I observed that most of the participants constructed generally consistent identities, although some, such as Bernice, portrayed themselves in contradictory ways (see Excerpt 4.8). Justifications for the participants' 'good' motherhood views and practices can even be found in more dispersed parts of the interviews, which contribute to the construction of generally coherent identities. Such consistency may be attributed to the fact that the interviews were semi-structured, with participants responding to pre-prepared questions. The largely consistent discourses they drew upon showed complex inscriptions of other discourses, though these may not be as visible as the ways other discourses were drawn on social media platforms, as I shall discuss later. For example, most of the time in interviews, reference to Islamic discourses and Islamic religious texts to justify 'good' motherhood opinions was implicit through *similar* or *contrastive positioning* of the self, compared with other Muslims, often

through the mention of the Malay people as a whole, all of whom are Muslim (see Excerpt 6.3 and Excerpt 6.4 (a)). Nonetheless, reference to Islamic teachings was often explicit through, for example, the mention of the Quran (see Excerpt 6.4 (b) and Excerpt 6.6 (a)).

The construction of identities in research interviews (as opposed to social media) and associated *positions* of *power* can be explained using the *relationality* principle of *genuine-artifice* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). The participants often, both explicitly and implicitly, drew on various discourses that directly affected them, such as Islamic discourses, ethnicity-related discourses and narratives of their lives to show and justify their relatively more '*real*' views about 'good' motherhood, compared to other mothers. In the analysis, I find that such *authentic* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) portrayals of self in interviews often were drawn upon to simultaneously construct relative *positions* of *power*. The private face-to-face textual context of research interviews potentially helped the participants feel sufficiently comfortable to portray an *authentic* (and thus *powerful*) self, discussing controversial issues that they would rather not communicate online (as expressed by some of them in response to Question 13 in the interview guide; see Appendix 2). Their inhibitions about presenting an *authentic* self online might stem from fear of judgments from and disputes among others, as well as unwillingness to display vulnerable or minority (and thus *powerless*) *positions* as certain types of mothers (see Excerpt 4.8 and the accompanying snippet, Excerpts 5.1, and the snippet before Post 5.2).

In the research interviews, the participants were found to establish *positions* of *powerfulness* when justifying that their views about 'good' motherhood were more *authorised* than others. This was mainly done by explicitly and implicitly *delegitimising* others' *positions* through their examples and narratives. For example, Ain could be seen to use her academic qualifications, past work experience and her research-related reading to *legitimise* her opinion that being a SAHM was the best decision for mothers (see Excerpts 5.1). This observation reflects the relevance of the *authority-delegitimacy* identity *relations* within the principle of *relationality* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) in the analysis of identity construction in the research interviews. Although the two concepts are interrelated, the participants' portrayals of self as being *authorised*, compared to merely being *genuine*, created *relatively* more

established discursive *positions*. Such *power relations* were constructed despite sometimes being mitigated by other discursive elements such as humour (see Post 4.2), disclaimers (see Excerpts 6.4 and Post 6.2) and rhetorical structures (Excerpt 4.2, Excerpt 5.2 and Excerpt 6.4(b)).

We now move on to discussing the ways the participants constructed their identities specifically through the medium of social media communication. The semi-public social media platforms of Facebook and Instagram offered the participants certain virtual and multimodal affordances which were not available in the private face-to-face context of research interviews. The relatively more public nature of social media also means that these platforms may offer some insights into how certain motherhood ideologies come to exist and are reproduced. The discourses drawn upon on social media were found to be more ambivalent, explicit and intertextualised for a number of reasons. First, this study engaged with data from two separate social media platforms, Facebook and Instagram, which, despite some similarities, are different in a number of subtle ways. Second, this study looked at social media data over a period of six months, which means the issues discussed on the digital platforms may naturally change over the period of time. Because of these factors, the identities constructed within and across the two social media platforms tended to be more erratic, competing and sometimes contradictory.

The ambivalent and intertextualised discourses drawn upon in the participants' portrayals of selves on social media platforms were related to the distinctiveness of the platforms themselves. The reference to *authorised* discourses was made explicit through the sharing of posts written by scholars who, for example, commented on medical or Islamic texts to justify their views (see Post 6.1 and Post 6.2). In Post 6.2, more specifically, Ain shared a social media post which utilised the voices of both medical and religious scholars to *legitimise* her own stance on vaccinating children, hence implicitly constructing a *position* of *relative powerfulness* with regard to her being a *relatively* 'better' mother. This was especially apparent on Facebook, as many participants shared articles from external sources on contentious topics related to motherhood. Such behaviour was seen as an attempt to appeal to wider *regional* or *global* discourses to support their *local* ideas of 'good' motherhood. For example, we could see Lippy Morgan drawing on competing intra-gender discourses of 'SAHM

versus WM' through visuals and hashtags on Facebook ("*#diaryofaworkingmom*" and "*#weekendhousewife*"), clearly showing her self-identification as a WM as opposed to a SAHM (see Post 5.1 and Post 5.2). Post 5.2, in particular, exemplified the fluidity of Lippy Morgan's career-related identities; she intermittently transgressed her identity as a WM and explicitly labelled herself through the domestic role normatively assigned to female parents in certain parts of her posts. The transgression demonstrated some participants' stronger orientations towards one identity *position* (e.g. as a mother, rather than an employee) in one textual context, unlike their different constructions of self in other research contexts (e.g. research interviews) (see Excerpts 5.3).

Certain discourses were drawn upon on social media in ways which were different from the interviews. In interviews, participants who drew on the discourse of 'gendered parenting' tended to use singular personal pronouns to *index* their *position* as the main parent. On Facebook, also, there was an absence of collective pronouns. The multimodal features of the digital platform, however, allowed participants to 'tag' their husbands in posts, for example, making it apparent to the wider public that the mothers were *positioning* themselves as the main parents (see Post 6.2). Hashtags were found to be the most commonly used semiotic element when drawing on certain discourses to construct specific identities. One common observation is the use of hashtags created specifically for one's own children, as a systematic form of documenting memories, a way of communicating with their children (see Post 4.1 and Post 4.3), and even giving voice to their children (see Post 4.1). In such examples, the participants' children were *powerlessly* included in their mothers' social media posts, in the participants' attempt to portray themselves as 'good' (and/or 'bad') mothers.

Of all these features, the incorporation of external sources on Facebook, as shown in Chapter 6, was the most explicit way of constructing agency, compared to other multimodal features on Facebook and Instagram. The simple 'sharing' feature allowed explicit reference to *authorised* discourses (mainly medical and religious), and could be interpreted as the participants' way of constructing themselves as 'good' mothers with relatively *authorised positions* (see Post 6.1 and Post 6.2). Although such a construction of identities had similarities with the construction of identities in the research interviews, it was arguably differentiated by the features of the digital platforms. In the context of this study, the relatively public social media platforms

represent a 'naturally-occurring' form of data compared to research interviews. Participants could portray themselves freely without any pre-set prompts, thus portraying their *authentic* selves in rather different ways. Overall, the depiction of *authentic* and *authorised positions* in relation to other mothers constitutes various modalities of *power*. The construction of identities on social media reveals layers of intertextuality that have not yet been considered in existing literature on motherhood discourses. More specifically within the context of social media, the notion of interdiscursivity is arguably more precise – the digital features discussed, which were once features in other genres or text types, are now hybridised onto the social media platform through which complex identity work is evidently seen.

In the final part of this section, I intend to delve further into the commonalities and discrepancies between the two textual contexts, considering how the two mediums operated together in the participants' overall discursive construction of identities. This fosters a more comprehensive understanding of interdiscursivity and agency within the fields of discourse and identity. Even though certain participants' portrayals of self in interviews and on social media were realised through different linguistic and semiotic strategies and can be contradictory, in most cases the textual contexts complemented one another.

Through the detailed *denotative* analysis (Baxter, 2007) carried out in each of the analysis chapters, I observed the various 'texts' cited by the participants in order to justify their 'good' motherhood beliefs and practices. Some participants explicitly referenced social media in their interviews as a medium through which they manifested and justified their 'good' motherhood ideals. This was seen in the data when Eva explained in detail during her interview how she had been judged on social media, showing me one of her posts to illustrate how she reclaimed her agency (see Excerpt 4.5 and Post 4.3). This observation also shows the relevance of interdiscursivity as the verbal interviews often tend to be inscribed with discursive elements from social media in order to more powerfully convey certain messages. For example, Eva's portrayal of herself as a 'good' mother in Post 4.3 was interpreted through an analysis of her non-normative definitions of the 'good' mother in several parts of the interview. Such an example shows that social media afforded participants the space to contest what it means to be a 'good' mother. This observation exemplifies how certain women use

social media to produce, reproduce and modify various 'good' mother ideals (Smyth, 2012; Steinberg, 2008) and implicitly co-construct their identities with their 'audience', thus eliciting both ratification and repercussions from people with diverse views about 'good' motherhood. Both the offline and virtual spaces have been shown to allow participants to voice their opinions and stories, and construct certain in-group and out-group demographic identities (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006).

Coherent portrayals of self were also observed even when there were contradictions in the participants' constructions of self across the different textual contexts. Different orientations to certain discourses of motherhood in interviews and social media posts were later revealed to actually work together to reinforce their portrayal of self as a 'good' mother (e.g. discourse of breastfeeding: see Bernice – snippet after Excerpt 4.2, Post 4.2 and Post 4.4). These observations elucidate that identities could be constructed coherently even when the participants seemingly portrayed themselves in contradiction to the dominant motherhood discourses across different textual contexts. The two posts also illustrate how some mothers feel able to publicly portray their 'troubled' and 'troublesome' motherhood-related identities by manoeuvring and *positioning* their ideals in *relation* to the realities of motherhood (Austin & Carpenter, 2008; Baran, 2018; Choi et al., 2005; Shelton & Johnson, 2006; Smyth, 2012; Weaver & Ussher, 1997). Such an understanding of the complementary and intertextualised identity relations at work may not have been apparent in one type of dataset alone, which reinforces the importance of looking at the two distinct textual contexts.

Overall, the discussion has demonstrated that consideration of such distinct sources of data can provide new insights into the ways participants constructed identities across distinct textual platforms. Also, the sequencing of the dataset, i.e. the use of social media data to supplement the analysis of the primary research interview data, contributed to the comprehensiveness of the analysis. It supported a systematic analysis which yielded in-depth interpretations of data according to the salient discourses and various power relations. It cannot be said which textual mode promoted a more *powerful* construction of self. However, it could be seen that the participants' own strategic use of intertextualised sources and interdiscursive features enabled the construction of an *authorised* self that was more explicit on social media as participants cited evidence and external sources. The construction of an *authentic* self,

nevertheless, was much stronger in interviews. Both types of selves allowed participants to *position* themselves as relatively more *powerful*: i.e., the more *authentic* and *authorised* their identities, the more *powerful* the participants *positioned* themselves to be. The utilisation of research interviews as the primary data and social media as supplementary data has also revealed that most of the time, the construction of self on social media could not be interpreted accurately without the participants' input in the interviews, but not vice versa. Nonetheless, the social media posts provided a comprehensive understanding of the ways identities are constructed in today's world, especially when they involve public discussions of contentious topics in motherhood. The more visual nature of social media, however, did not support a rich 'micro' *denotative* and linguistic analysis of the identities on this platform, compared to interviews. The textual contexts themselves can be regarded as intertextual and interdiscursive, contributing to a wealth of existing literature on the forms and roles of intertextuality in identity construction. My findings have revealed increasingly *intertextualised* and interdiscursive ways of constructing and negotiating identities, in comparison to other recent discursive identity research (Baran, 2018).

7.4.2 Temporality: A form of intertextuality?

In the analysis, the participants drew on various temporal elements to construct their 'good' mother identities. This was not exactly surprising, for I have argued earlier in the analysis that I consider 'change' to be an overarching theme that defines motherhood in the first instance. In this section, I shall not only argue how temporality is salient in identity construction, but also bring to attention how it is another pertinent facet of interdiscursivity, and how this relates to the constructions of agency through various *positions* of *power*, specifically in relation to motherhood discourses. Temporality has often been highlighted as an important aspect mostly in narrative analyses of identity (Baran, 2018; Georgakapoulou, 2013), whilst the current study has shown that this is not necessarily the case. The discussion will elucidate some temporal aspects used by the participants to portray themselves as 'good' mothers. To a great extent, the many forms of temporality were attributed to the different textual contexts (and the interdiscursive features) utilised in this research. This has helped me to determine that temporality is a form of interdiscursivity in identity construction. To unpack this theoretical proposal, I shall discuss temporality in relation to the findings

within and across both the textual contexts of research interviews and social media posts.

In research interviews, reference to various temporal elements manifested itself in several forms, with reference to both past and future time. The most common way was that the participants drew on their past selves as less experienced mothers, or even non-mothers, often to support their current *different* and more *authorised positions* as mothers. This strategy exemplifies one of the ways certain participants deride the expectation that mothers naturally 'excel' at mothering (Abrams & Curran, 2010; Martell, 2001; Mercer, 2004). Sometimes the participants expressed how their realities collided with their expectations of motherhood (see Excerpts 4.9). Reference to non-motherhood also indicates a form of temporality as participants portrayed themselves as having been transformed into *different* people after becoming mothers, thus *positioning* themselves in *relative positions* of *powerfulness* (for being more womanly and having experiences that non-mothers do not) and *powerlessness* as women (for not being in control in the transformation) (see Excerpts 4.9). At times, the participants drew on different aspects of temporality, not only by quoting their own past experiences but also by mentioning others of considerably different ages, such as their aunts (see Excerpt 5.2) and their mothers (see Excerpts 6.1). Through reference to these other women, the participants *positioned* themselves as an out-group member, to powerfully reinforce or challenge their current motherhood experiences or beliefs. Sometimes, a temporal element could also be detected through references to traditional customs (e.g. Excerpts 6.1), which showed the *positioning* of self in relation to 'older' motherhood practices.

Participants also sometimes referred to future possibilities to imagine how their current decisions would impact themselves and their families over time. This finding is in line with the unique self-dimension of 'possible selves' to refer to future rather than current self, as highlighted by Dörnyei and Ushioda (2009), which represents "the individuals' ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming" (p. 11). Ain, for example, referred to hypothetical future selves to support her decision to be a WAHM, therefore *positioning* herself as both *powerless,* and arguably, *powerful* (see Excerpt 5.1 (b)). Furthermore, some participants claimed that a 'good' mother could only be judged in retrospect,

temporally dependent on how their children develop in the future (see Excerpt 4.3). Justifying motherhood views and practices using religious texts like the Quran reinforced Muslim participants' *authorised positions* by implying that their opinions and practices were in keeping with the holy texts that were believed to transcend time – that is, they are true and relevant in the past, present and indefinite future. This can be seen in Excerpt 6.6 (a) when Tasha quoted the Quran and other religious discourses to construct her ongoing commitment to become a 'better' Muslim and mother. While these references to different temporal realms represent a weak *diachronic* perspective on the ways identities were temporally constructed, they were elicited in a single research interview and so limited conclusions can be drawn. Nevertheless, they provide some evidence of the ways temporality can translate into interdiscursivity, and its significance in constructing *power relations*.

In comparison to research interviews, sampling data from social media supported a *relatively* more enhanced temporal engagement with the data, thus allowing a more empirically verifiable *diachronic* view of identity construction. One of the ways was by looking at how the participants portrayed changes in themselves over the six-month data collection period (from early March 2016 until the end of August 2016), with the times of postings clearly indicated through the 'date (and time) stamps' (see two posts by Lippy Morgan – Post 5.1 and Post 5.2). This illustrates the fluidity of identities as they are constructed over time. Some participants' social media accounts can be regarded as an online diary on being a mother, especially if they consistently labelled their motherhood-related posts using hashtags. The participants' use of hashtags, which also functions like a hyperlink within the inherently formative nature of social media (Saxton, Niyirora, Guo & Waters, 2015), can be deciphered as a way of *powerfully* constructing more 'lasting' 'good' mother identities. Such temporal constructions of evaluative identities conveyed more impact than the interviews because they were easily accessible to the chosen members of the public as well as the subjects of the posts themselves, not least the participants' children, beyond the immediate moment of posting. Secondly, most of the posts can be considered a reflection of past events that the participants chose to present to their audience. Since I did not look at any 'live' social media postings which are becoming increasingly popular (Georgakopoulou, 2018), most of the posts did represent the participants' orientation to their past identities, which for various reasons they considered relevant

in the present moment of posting. This was especially evident on Instagram, the more 'personal' platform most participants used to visually portray their motherhood-related life stories. Temporal posts ranged from the immediate past - hours or days earlier, to more distant 'throwbacks' - months or years before. This shows that social media not only allows various constructions of 'good' motherhood to be produced and reproduced (Goodwin & Huppatz, 2010), but also allows 'good' motherhood to be reinforced, negotiated and reconstructed over time. By presenting competing and contradictory versions of themselves over time, participants negotiated their motherhood identities in many transformative ways.

In general, temporal elements are apparent on social media by virtue of the mode of communication, which promotes expressions of past and present identities. Also, technical and visual features such as audio-visuals, labels, links and hashtags were used to *position* the participants' current selves as relatively more *authorised* in *relation* to their past selves. On the one hand, constructing identities through the use of such features may be argued as lacking *authenticity,* in as much as the users can carefully construct and edit posts over time. From another perspective, the use of such features to construct identities via various temporal elements provides users with various subject positions. Such features allowed participants to portray themselves in various ways at different temporal contexts without having direct communication with other people. Although the 'editing' features may not promote *authenticity*, they provide *authority* and agency for the users to change their own posts howsoever and whenever they like over time. However, none of the Facebook posts analysed in this study have shown any evidence of being 'edited'. The same, however, cannot be evaluated with regards to Instagram posts, as the platform does not provide indications of the editing process. The 'editing' features on social media not only allow users to reflect on their *positions* of *relative powerlessness* in the past in comparison to their *relatively powerful positions* in the present (and vice versa), but also support the continual negotiation, re-negotiation and *delegitimisation* of certain norms of motherhood. This argument echoes the framing of online communicative platforms as spaces that can be visited, reviewed and reorganised (De Fina 2016, as cited in Baran, 2018). The observation also reflects certain scholars' assertions that online platforms like social media support the growing perception that mothering is a site of agency and that the use of social media is one of the strategies to cope with conflicts in

motherhood (Apple, 2006; Smyth, 2012). For these reasons, I see the more agentive orientations to past identities on social media as presenting a more empirically verifiable stronger *diachronic* perspective of how identities are constructed and transformed over time, compared to the research interviews.

To conclude, the discussion of temporality within the two textual platforms has highlighted that research interviews offered a largely *synchronic* and limited *diachronic* engagement with and understanding of discourse and identity, whilst studying past social media posts offered an enhanced *diachronic* view which supplemented the interviews. Analysing both data sources has generated deeper insights into the nature of identity construction which is anything but static. Overall, considerations of past, present and future selves across the two textual platforms have provided a *diachronic* perspective of identity construction – albeit rather subjectively - in as much as the study has managed to capture a sense of the fleeting, fluid and dynamic construction of 'good' mother identities over time. The analysis has shown the need to refine the concept of intertextuality (including interdiscursivity), to ensure that the salient concepts of textual speech contexts (especially the digital context of social media) and temporal realms are included in discussion on intertextuality when researching identities. The analysis of intertextualised and interdiscursive discourses should not only be tied to discursive 'contents', but also to various interactional and spatial contexts (not just the general idea of *global*, *regional* and *local*), as well as temporal settings (past, present and future), beyond the 'here and now'. This could address a common criticism of certain discourse analytic approaches, that such approaches tend to be over-reliant on the immediate interactional context as the site for identity analysis (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). Identities are actually constructed in many ways and on many levels, and this study's engagement with different textual contexts is not employed merely to triangulate findings, but rather to provide a more substantive, and nuanced, picture of the complexities inherent in the processes of identity construction. How such refined understandings of interdiscursivity are relevant and positioned within the analytical framework shall be discussed in the following section.

7.5 Evaluating the integrated analytical framework

This section will discuss how the analytical framework has framed my analysis of data, and elucidate the ways the findings have informed my understanding of the relationships between the concepts used, and broader contributions to the fields of discourse and identity research. This section is, therefore divided into two sub-sections: (i) the links between the concepts within each of the analytical frameworks; and (ii) the links between concepts across the three frameworks.

7.5.1 The links between concepts within each framework

In this section, I will discuss the relationships between the concepts within each of the three frameworks used in the combined analytical framework in this study (see section 3.2.2 and Figure 3.3). I will first discuss the concepts within Baxter's (2007) FPDA, then Bucholtz and Hall's sociocultural linguistic principles of identity construction (2005), and finally, Schippers' concept of hegemonic femininities (2007).

There are two key concepts within FPDA that have been utilised extensively in this study: (a) the *denotative-connotative* levels of analysis; and (b) the *powerfulness-powerlessness* relations. As Baxter (2007) proposed, the *denotative* analysis has been found to be a prerequisite to generating more comprehensive *connotative* interpretations of the data in discourse analysis. In many discourse analytic studies, the *denotative* and *connotative* analyses of discourses were typically done together without highlighting their differences, a method which sometimes does not clearly justify the analysis of certain linguistic details over others. The detailed *denotative* analysis in this research has allowed me to analyse systematically by examining the function of various linguistic resources in the construction of identities, and their relations to broader issues (e.g. gender, power, intertextuality and temporality). This allows the construction of power, usually illuminated in *connotative* analysis, to be clearly extrapolated from 'micro' level discourses. For example, the *denotative* analysis allowed me to identify the salient use of temporal adverbs such as "*still*", which were important in understanding the ways some participants constructed their current selves in *relation* to their past selves at the *connotative* level (see Excerpts 4.6). The *connotative* level of analysis, hence, has facilitated 'macro' understandings of linguistic resources. The *connotative* analysis also highlighted how participants

implicitly and explicitly *positioned* themselves in terms of *relative powerfulness* or *powerlessness* in *relation* to certain people, issues, or even textual and temporal contexts, as discussed earlier.

The *connotative* analysis has also generated comprehensive interpretations of wider issues relating to gender, such as inter- and intra-gender constructions of identities that may not be visible through *denotative* analysis alone. The fact that FPDA supports the analysis of power differences between women at the *connotative* level has therefore led to a more nuanced perspective on the processes of intra-gender identity construction. The process involved mothers portraying views and practices of 'good' motherhood in relation to other females within and across different textual and temporal settings. Thus, the *connotative* analyses have shown that the processes of identity construction typically involved participants competing for *positions* of *power* and constructing their identities by *positioning* and *relating* themselves (Baxter, 2007; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) to other people, especially women. These people typically represented various facets of the dominant 'good' motherhood discourses and different vectors through which the participants negotiated their dynamic identities and motherhood challenges. In keeping with the principles of FPDA, both the *denotative* and the *connotative* levels have emerged as being complementary and useful in the discursive analysis of identities in the thesis. The nature of the *denotative-connotative* analysis, which links 'micro' linguistic features to 'macro' interpretations, means that it is not possible to discuss these two levels in absolute isolation. It is more useful to separate them for the purposes of analysis. However, because relying on FPDA alone may be too generic to understanding identities and too specific to gender issues, without a consideration of the specific concepts relevant to identity construction processes, the principles proposed by Bucholtz and Hall (2005) indeed emerged as being necessary in this study.

With regards to the sociocultural linguistic principles of identity construction (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), the decision to select only three out of the five principles, namely *indexicality*, *positionality* and *relationality*, to analyse the data has led to a focused discursive analysis of identity construction processes. However, the analysis has also triggered questions regarding how these three principles were related to one another. In general, these three principles were identified as being the most suitable to

capture the 'messiness' of the processes of identity construction in this study, but they were also interlinked and complemented each other in many ways. I see *relationality* as being the overarching and most salient principle, encompassing the other two principles. This observation is in line with Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) assertion that *relationality* is at the 'heart' of sociocultural linguistic principles of identity construction. This principle was found to be relevant in almost every part of the *connotative* analysis; participants often constructed themselves in *positions* of '*relatedness'* and they could not do this autonomously or independently (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). As mothers, all participants constructed their identities as 'good' mothers (and/or 'bad' mothers) through their *relations* to their own children, and this reflects the commonly held precept that the measure of a mother is her child, and that the child can powerfully transform her identity as a mother (Austin & Carpenter, 2008; Goodwin & Huppatz, 2010; McMahon 1995; Oh, 2010).

More distinctively, the participants did not merely construct their identities in *relation* to other people but also sometimes in *relation* to their own selves (as shown in the discussion on temporality), God, traditions, or different temporal realms, among others. Thus, the *relationality* principle best explains how constructions of gendered identities, authority and power actually occur in interactions. As with FPDA, *relationality* has identified the social actors involved in 'intra-gender' relations (e.g. participant-other mothers, participant-non-mother, participant-own mothers of a different generation) as well as 'inter-gender' relations (e.g. participant-spouse). This has allowed the tensions and conflicts underlying these relations to be understood further in terms of normative constructions of 'good' motherhood, 'me versus others', 'me = others' and how conforming to or subverting these norms can construct, transmit and reproduce various realisations of agency and power.

Relationality is found to be most closely related to the principle of *positionality*. Many scholars in fact argue that identity revolves around the *positioning* of self in *relation* to others (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). The data have shown that almost always, the two principles worked together in identity construction. The *positionality* principle was more precise in terms of specifying how the participants situated themselves, especially in terms of *power* relations. However, the principle of *indexicality* was also relevant and linked to the overall principle of *relationality.*

Indexicality focused on how some participants used specific linguistic features such as pronouns to *index* their underlying identities, and their different *positionings* (e.g. personal or collective) and *relationships* (e.g. construction of 'otherness') (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). This principle was found to be the most linguistically specific of all three and, thus, only occasionally relevant, especially within the *denotative* analysis. Overall, I claim that these three distinct but interrelated principles have been highly relevant for the analysis of data in this study. Reiterating the argument proposed in Chapter 3, Bucholtz and Hall's remaining two principles of *emergence* and *partialness* were indeed found to be unnecessary in this study; the former is too all-encompassing, whilst the latter offers too broad a scope and is more suitable for longitudinal identity studies. The three principles utilised in this research worked in conjunction with one another both in the more detailed 'micro' linguistic analysis and the wider 'macro' analysis of social meanings related to the constructions of motherhood identities.

The *local*, *regional* and *global* levels within Schippers' hegemonic femininities also proved salient for this study, for they specified the spatial elements in which identity construction took place, ranging from the *local* interactional speech context (intra- and inter-speech contexts), to the acknowledgement of the *regional* setting (the Malaysian context and cultural *hegemonic* concepts of 'good' motherhood), and finally to the *global* level in which I see dominant or traditional discourses being applicable. As mentioned in Chapter 3 and Section 7.3 earlier, the levels were often not clear-cut and sometimes overlapped (as discussed in section 7.3). With regards to gender hegemony, these three levels consider power ideologies and femininity, encompassing not only 'normative' and *hegemonic* gendered relations, but also *hegemonic* motherhood, a notion that has been shown to be subjective and contextual in different ways at all levels. The levels allowed hidden but salient *power* relations to be revealed, and the emphasis on *hegemony* has helped to underscore the significant evaluative aspects found in the participants' data. In short, although the supplementary framework offered by Schippers (2007) is not relevant in all parts of analysis, it has facilitated understanding of the full complexity of gendered and 'good' motherhood identity constructions in terms of diverse social contexts, within and beyond Malaysia.

7.5.2 The links between concepts across the three frameworks

Based on the analysis of data in all three analysis chapters, I conclude that the different theoretical components within the integrated analytical framework have been shown to complement one another, uncovering the nuances of identity construction processes among Malaysian mothers. The links between the concepts have illustrated the distinctive ways that identities are constructed, refining the ways we view and analyse them. For instance, we can see that a comprehensive analysis of discursive identity construction processes should consider key elements that are often overlooked, such as the specific social contexts of the participants and the textual contexts of the interactions through which the extended relevance of intertextuality has been revealed.

All the frameworks have provided different perspectives on *power* relations. Each framework addressed the limitations inherent in others. The limitations of exploring identities and corresponding power relations from the rather generic *powerfulness-powerlessness* axis in FPDA have been addressed by including Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) three specific principles of, especially *positionality* and *relationality*. Of particular relevance are the specific identity relations within *relationality* that relate to power (especially *authenticity-artifice* and *authority-delegitimisation*), as well as the *local*, *regional* and *global* levels described within hegemonic femininities (Schippers, 2007). From the sociocultural perspective of linguistic identity construction, the concepts within FPDA have narrowed down the focus to establish a critical discursive approach which looked at gendered relations pertinent to the study of motherhood. The concepts also specified the type of *power relations* (*powerfulness* and/or *powerlessness*) that could be examined in the analysis, along with specifications in terms of the spatial *levels* at which these *power relations* are constructed (Schippers, 2007) (see Excerpts 5.1). The ways the women in this study expressed themselves in terms of the *similarities* and *differences* within and between women also support the empowering vision of FPDA itself that refuses to constitute gender in binary terms (Baxter, 2007). Moreover, combining FPDA (Baxter, 2007) and hegemonic femininities (Schippers, 2007) allowed me to argue that *local* constructions of gendered identities and corresponding power relations were revealed at the *denotative* level of analysis, whilst the wider *regional* and *global* levels of gendered identities and power relations were typically understood through the *connotative* analysis. The

three interrelated spatial levels have also fostered better understanding of 'where' the *powerless* and *powerful* constructions of power *relations* within FPDA operate. In sum, the combined framework foregrounds the relationships between *relations* of *power* and identity construction.

In terms of the way data are analysed and presented, the lack of systematic levels of linguistic analysis in the identity principles (since the three principles are highly intertwined), have been addressed by the more systematic *connotative* levels of analysis in FPDA and the spatial levels in hegemonic femininities. The *connotative* level of interpretation has allowed greater understanding of identity construction processes offered by Bucholtz and Hall (2005), as well as enabling the power relations in FPDA and hegemonic femininities to be unpacked further. At the *denotative* level, the principle of *indexicality* was the most useful, for it specifically examined linguistic resources in the portrayal of oneself, such as pronouns and other deictic expressions. In essence, I view the principle of *indexicality* to be more specific than the level of *denotation* because this principle involves looking at specific linguistic structures to reveal a person's underlying identities. The *denotative* level of analysis is seen to be more general, encompassing an unlimited range of linguistic and semiotic features. The depth of the analysis, from consideration of detailed linguistic resources to general issues like relationships and power, means that the three principles foster comprehensive understanding of identity construction and negotiation processes. The principles allow wider *connotative* analysis to include not just analysis of *power relations* and gender but also relevant discourses illuminated through the specific processes of *indexing*, *positioning* and *relating* oneself to other identity categories and discourses. The findings in this thesis have confirmed that *indexical* processes occur at all levels of linguistic structure and use, and that the linguistic resources that *indexically* produce these identities are broad and flexible. In short, within the *denotative* analysis, we have seen see how the principles of identity construction operated, especially *indexicality*, at the 'micro' linguistic level. At the *connotative* level, all three identity construction principles, along with *power* relations (Baxter, 2007) and spatial levels (Schippers, 2007), operated together to construct identities on 'macro' sociocultural levels.

The different concepts within the combined analytical framework are linked to another dimension of textual analysis within FPDA: the *synchronic-diachronic* dimension. When explaining the aspect of temporality earlier, I touched on how the temporal aspects inherent in the two modes of data (research interviews and social media) provided some degree of *diachronic* interpretation of the data, even though this study was not specifically designed to be longitudinal. Here, I highlight which concepts in the analytical framework show *synchronic* and/or *diachronic* identity relations. The findings have shown that both *synchronic* and *diachronic* time axes were relevant to all the concepts that have been used to analyse data in this study. The *connotative* rather than the *denotative* level, the principles of *positionality-relationality* rather than *indexicality* principles, and *regional-global* levels rather than the *local*, were more open to *diachronic* interpretations. Nonetheless, in general, all these concepts to some degree operationalised both *synchronic* and *diachronic* time relations.

As explained earlier, the *denotative-connotative* analysis facilitated a discourse analysis that has breadth and depth, and also supports a systematic approach to analysing discursive data for both spoken research interviews and multimodal social media posts. My slight adaptation of the ways I presented the *denotative* and *connotative* interpretations in the analysis also represents a contribution in terms of data presentation in discursive identity research. I have shown that the use of the levels in alternate sequence for each selected data excerpt (instead of organising the two levels in two separate sections) can reveal the close relations between the 'micro' linguistic analysis and the 'macro' sociocultural processes of discursive identity construction. Such an approach has produced an analysis that is closely-connected and not repetitive, whilst still maintaining a degree of systematicity that assisted the process of interpretation for the researcher, as well as aids comprehension for the readers.

Overall, the observations revealed through the use of the integrated analytical framework have unpacked the complexities of discursive identity construction processes in understudied social, discursive, textual and temporal settings. The discussion above has elucidated the ways salient concepts within identity construction are situated and linked, and how they can operate together to illuminate identity construction processes more comprehensively. The findings have also shown that the

framework can be used to analyse both spoken data from research interviews as well as online data taken from social media posts.

7.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has discussed how and what this study contributes to the general fields of discourse and identity, as well as more specifically, to the fields of gendered identity construction and motherhood discourses. I have explicated contributions in terms of the various identities constructed by the participants, and situated these identities within the social context of Malaysia. More importantly, I have considered the theoretical contributions of this study – through the research interviews and social media as the textual contexts, and the proposed integrated analytical framework. The discussion has further revealed how this study contributes to a deeper understanding of intertextuality that goes beyond multiple discourses in terms of content to include various textual and temporal contexts. This study also enhances existing theorisations of the underlying relationships between various concepts within the combined analytical framework.

The concluding chapter to follow will consider this study's broader social implications, and make some suggestions for future empirical studies to further affirm the significance of this study.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This final chapter concludes the thesis by first reviewing the findings of the study and then reiterating the contributions of this study to the wider research contexts of discourse, identity, gender and digital communication, as discussed in Chapter 7. In the ensuing section, I will elucidate the social implications of the research beyond the context of this study. The chapter will then consider the limitations of this research and offer suggestions for future research. This chapter ends with some final remarks.

Briefly reviewing the whole thesis, the introductory chapter set out my aim to explore the discursive construction of identities among new mothers in Malaysia. The study progressed by reviewing related literature in Chapters 1 and 2, specifying the proposed research methodology in Chapter 3, and addressing the research questions in detail in the three analysis chapters (Chapters 4 to 6). The analysis led to a discussion of the distinctive processes of constructing identities presented in Chapter 7: (i) in and through intersecting and often culturally-specific discourses, which produced overlapping and competing identities; (ii) within the under-researched social context of Malaysia; (iii) across the under-studied textual contexts of research interviews and social media posts; and (iv) using a unique analytical framework. I argue that these knowledge-based and theoretical findings contribute immensely to existing scholarship on discursive identity construction.

8.2 Main contributions of this research

As articulated in Chapter 2, despite the growing research interest in discursive identity construction, there has been a significant gap in investigating motherhood discourses and discursive identity construction in settings outside of Australasia, North America and Europe; the present study has sought to redress this. The findings of this study have offered substantial knowledge-based contributions, not only in terms of the intersections between the sociocultural linguistic fields of discourse, identity, gender and digital communication, but also more specifically, the interdisciplinary research areas of motherhood, discursive identity construction, specific linguistic and

discursive features, and social media in the context of Malaysia. Despite constructing multiple overlapping identities, the participants often portrayed themselves in parental, gender-specific and evaluative ways, or in other words, by *positioning* themselves as different types of 'good' (and/or 'bad') mothers.

More significantly, the previous chapter has also emphasised the contributions this study makes to theories of identity construction processes in the textual contexts of research interviews and social media posts. By sampling and analysing different modes of communicative data that encompass digital communication (specifically semi-public social networking sites with adjustable public-private settings controlled by the user), a deeper understanding of intertextuality, that comprises intertextualised discourses in terms of content and contexts (interactional and temporal), has been revealed. The use of these types of data in research deserves greater methodological attention because the data present real discursive spaces within which ordinary people exercise their agency with various degrees of privacy and levels of disclosure. Through diverse textual contexts, parents may inadvertently or actively reinforce, resist, contest and subvert notions of (good) parenthood through their seemingly 'mundane' daily motherhood experiences, thus powerfully shaping the ways the discourses are (re)produced in society. These findings highlight that the integration of offline and online discursive spaces has been fruitful for studying identity construction, as the unique features of each textual context provide insights into the ways people construct transformative discursive *positions* when negotiating various versions of (good) motherhood. Through these theoretical contributions, it is hoped that future research on discursive identity construction will not overlook the highly relevant textual and temporal contexts.

This study has also contributed to a greater understanding of the relationships between the concepts used in the integrated analytical framework. Adopting the analytical perspectives of feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis (Baxter, 2007), sociocultural linguistics (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) and hegemonic femininities (Schippers, 2007), the study has identified links within and between the different frameworks, fostering a clearer picture of the complex ways people negotiate various power, gendered, socioeconomic and sociocultural *positions* and *relations* at various levels. The innovative combination of these distinct but interrelated frameworks has

offered a fresh approach to analysing multimodal data, along with a consideration of the need to integrate various social, textual and temporal contexts in which the discourses operate. This finding continues to build and feed into current theoretical debates about identity construction.

Overall, the *localised* findings of this study have illuminated the significance of reconceptualising intertextuality, and have proposed an analytical approach which contributes to *global* debates about how identities are discursively constructed and analysed.

8.3 Social implications of this research

In this section, I shall explicate the social implications of the study for the immediate participants, (new) mothers and the public in general, institutions and future researchers.

8.3.1 Participants

Despite the increasing number of sociolinguistic studies researching discursive constructions of identities, there have been few empirical studies that offer people, and more specifically (new) mothers, more awareness of the ways they can and do construct transformative discursive positions through language. Since such a 'transformative quest' is one of the central aims of FPDA (Baxter, 2007), this study intends to support *localised* social transformations by providing the participants with more constructive interactional spaces in which they can understand their "deeply-contested and emotionally fraught role" (Smyth, 2012, back cover) and continue to communicate about competing motherhood beliefs, experiences and demands in empowering ways. Aside from the research interviews that were conducted, this study plans to extend the opportunities for discussion by creating a dedicated blog for the participants, with various communicative features (e.g. forum discussion, comments sections), to discuss any issues related to the study. Since the participants are geographically dispersed across Malaysia, it is most practical to 'give back' through a blog which can only be accessed by them, unlike other platforms that are either too public (e.g. forum discussion websites like '*Mumsnet'*) or too private (e.g. personal

messages on WhatsApp, Facebook or Instagram that may consume too much time). The platform hopes to enlighten them on the significant contributions they have made in our understanding of the complexities of identity construction, and to receive their feedback on the findings. If the participants' consent is obtained, I plan to include some of their data excerpts for discussion on the blog, and highlight some of the salient identity construction processes at work. Overall, the main purpose of the blog is to help participants become more critical about the various discourses they draw on and orient to in their interactions, particularly the contextual and contesting *hegemonic* discourses. The participants, therefore, can potentially transform their *power relations*, which parallels the principal 'mission' of FPDA (Baxter, 2007). I also believe the blog will provide both the researcher and the participants a semi-private platform to communicate with one another, possibly sparking more ideas for further research and social improvements.

Another action to give back to the participants is to create a hashtag specifically for the participants to access anything that I have posted on my own Facebook and Instagram accounts relating to this research. This is feasible because, thus far, all the participants are still my 'friends' and 'followers' on these platforms. I shall inform my participants of this hashtag and any posts labelled with this hashtag can be used for discussion on the blog. For instance, I have created the hashtag '*#azrinsphdjourney*' which is used to tag all posts related to my PhD-related work, some of which are directly related to the findings of my research. These posts and the hashtag have been accessible to approved followers on my Facebook account since 2015, including my participants (starting around September 2016). This endeavour is intended to give them resources to examine and reflect on their daily discursive practices related to motherhood across multiple communicative channels.

8.3.2 (New) mothers and the public

I intend to promote my findings not only to mothers and women, but to all people across society including men, parents and non-parents, younger people, teachers, and medical practitioners. I believe that if 'it takes a village to raise a child', it also requires the whole community, at all levels, to understand discursive identity construction in order to better support parents, mothers and guardians. Without appropriate awareness

and support, parents may continue to position themselves in restrictive ways, associating the female with the concept of the 'main parent', for example, without much negotiation.

Social network platforms are deemed to be easily accessible resources through which awareness can be created, and related events can be organised. A more public blog or Facebook group page to relay the general findings of my research – a space in which people from heterogeneous cultural backgrounds in Malaysia can freely contribute – therefore, could be set up. This is one of the many ways this research can contribute to society, because existing public social network pages for mothers in Malaysia tend to be focused on specific motherhood interests and practices, or even for motherhood-related businesses. Such an endeavour could reach a wide range of people through the organisation of motherhood-related events (e.g. talks and meetings to share the significance of my findings). Also, imparting the findings of the current study to diverse communities via social network pages and events could be useful to facilitate bigger-scale and fruitful collaborations with relevant NGOs in the future.

8.3.3 Institutions

At a more formal level, I plan to approach relevant institutions to translate my findings into programmes or products that can foster the wellbeing of parents. I aim for constructive discussions with relevant parties to convince them that my findings can create awareness among the public about the importance of understanding discursive processes of identity construction.

First, I intend to approach the Ministry of Health Malaysia to propose the idea of including a 'sociocultural linguistic' element to the courses delivered in public hospitals just before child birth, that typically cover practical preparations (e.g. labour and breastfeeding), to better support both future female and male parents for parenthood. I will try to persuade relevant people in the ministry to understand that an awareness of how language works, the daily exposure new mothers receive from various communicative channels, and the ways they communicate their motherhood beliefs and experiences with others, can have a significant impact on their emotional and mental health. New parents should be made aware of common sociocultural linguistic challenges, along with other more obvious challenges associated with raising

a baby. In these discussions, I will suggest that the ministry include sociocultural linguistic factors into the courses, or into pamphlets distributed to expecting parents, so that they can understand the significance of these factors in nurturing the wellbeing of families.

8.3.4 Research practice

This thesis also provides a further social and empirical contribution to research practice through my efforts to share and disseminate my findings. I plan to continue presenting different parts of my thesis at academic conferences so that I can pass on knowledge-based, theoretical and social contributions to other researchers. I hope that this will support future researchers in similar fields. I also aim to publish my findings in reputable journals on discourse and society, identity, social media and motherhood studies. I may also organise talks pertaining to the significance of my research within and across faculties and universities within and beyond Malaysia, utilising my workplace at a public university in Malaysia as a starting point. I shall continue to address the gaps in research on motherhood discourses and identity, taking up some of the suggestions that I shall explicate in the following section.

8.4 Limitations of the study and further avenues for research

The narrow focus of this study is regarded as a strength of this study because it has allowed me to address my research aims through in-depth analysis. The limitations of this research arose from the demarcations that have been purposefully set for practical reasons, such as the types of textual data used, the 'filters' applied to the type of social media posts analysed, the length of the study, the number and 'types' of participants, the featured discourses and the specific concepts in the combined analytical framework. These limitations, however, have sparked the following ideas for future research on parenthood discourses and identities: (i) using more forms of textual data; (ii) conducting a more longitudinal study; (iii) going beyond 'new' and 'normative' motherhood by using a variety of, and more, participants; (iv) incorporating other themes and social factors; and (v) employing alternative analytical approaches.

8.4.1 Using more forms of textual data

Even though this study collected and analysed two very different and rich sources of data, there were some necessary constraints on the range of data that I could incorporate into this PhD project. Future research on discourse and identity, hence, can consider utilising alternative sources of data. Ideally, the sources should integrate private-public modes of communication, 'real'-'virtual' realms and/or spoken-written discourses. Some suggestions would be to include other types of social networking sites such as YouTube, blogs, Twitter, Snapchat, personal websites, online forums, specific smartphone applications (e.g. WhatsApp), as well as printed media and advertisements related to motherhood discourses. This is because digital platforms are rich sites for researching discursive identity constructions, as interactions can take place both privately and publicly. I would also like to note the need for research funding in the future so that I and other researchers have the resources required to collect and engage with a broader spectrum of dataset. Even if the same sources of data are to be used in future research, I would suggest the way the data are approached, i.e. as primary and secondary data, could be different. I believe that other ways of constructing power relations may be revealed if the research interviews and social media posts are given equal importance in terms of data collection and analysis, or if social media data become the focus of the research.

With regards to the research interviews, future research could utilise different types of interviewing methods, such as unstructured individual and focused-group interviews, and even digital interviews (e.g. Skype, WhatsApp video call), to obtain richer understandings of how identities may be constructed. If more time is available, more social media posts could be analysed in future research to further unpack a range of multimodal features afforded by this platform (Baran, 2018; Georgakapoulou, 2013), hopefully adding insights into other ways identities are discursively constructed on digital platforms (see section 8.4.5 for relevant analytical approaches). The intertextualised nature of social media means that future research should analyse more features of social media posts, such as videos, audio, comments' section, posts with no captions, GIFs, and other audio-visual features borrowed from other applications (e.g. Snapchat and Boomerang applications that are available for use on Instagram), that have been deliberately excluded from analysis in this study. Another striking new feature of social media, Facebook and Instagram 'stories', could also be a focus for

future research into the discursive construction of identities. Posts to motherhood groups and pages with more members could also be utilised to see how identities are constructed intersubjectively with other users on relatively more public platforms. Clearly the many digital spaces of social media can provide multiple intertextualised sources of data for future research on discursive constructions of identities.

8.4.2 Conducting more longitudinal studies

Since this study employed a single interview session with each participant and collected social media posts across six months, it can only offer a largely *synchronic* view and a limited *diachronic* perspective on the ways identities are constructed. Research into the discursive construction of identities could consider conducting more longitudinal studies with multiple interviews with each participant over a set period of time. The period of data collection for social media posts could also be longer to unpack users' constructions and negotiations of identities across time, especially when the features of social media sites are often updated fairly regularly. Addressing this aspect can potentially provide insights on the transformative ways identities are constructed. To exemplify, when my data were collected (1 March 2016 – 31 August 2016), the 'story' feature on social media sites had not yet been introduced. This feature was only launched on Instagram and Facebook in August 2016 and March 2017, respectively. If the same study was to be conducted today and include 'stories' as data, I believe other interesting findings about identity constructions will be yielded.

8.4.3 Going beyond 'new' and 'normative' motherhood

In terms of the criteria for the selection of participants, I would first suggest that future research on motherhood identities consider selecting mothers who are not necessarily 'new', as operationalised in this study. They could be first-time mothers, have more children, or those who are older, and conceived their first child(ren) at an older age. I would also suggest future research to go beyond studying 'normative' mothers who position themselves as married, female, heterosexual and middle-class parents. Future research should consider participants who position themselves as possibly divorced or widowed, unmarried, homosexual and/or male parents. To address the aim of FPDA (Baxter, 2007), it is fundamental to recognise such underprivileged voices of parents

which are persistently silenced and/or absent in research related to parenthood and discursive identities. For example, there has been other research that looks at constructions of 'good' motherhood among lesbian parents (Lewin, 1994; Rawsthorne, 2010), but these studies have mostly been conducted in the dominant research settings of Australasia, Europe and North America, and do not look at discursive identity construction or incorporate digital data. If fathers are to be sourced as participants to study the discursive construction of parental identities or more specifically, fatherhood identities through discourses of fatherhood (Litosseliti, 2006; Sunderland, 2004), they could include those who are parenting alongside their female spouses, single fathers, or stay-at-home-husbands who carry out domestic responsibilities typically carried out by female parents. Such an exploration would allow more research to be conducted on how parenthood is constructed in gendered terms and tainted with discernible gender stereotypes (Mackenzie, 2016; Wharton, 2009). In terms of social class, since my study examined 'privileged' mothers, future research can attempt to incorporate participants from more diverse backgrounds, including those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. I believe the ways they discursively portray and position themselves, their motherhood beliefs and experiences, in relation to dominant discourses will be strikingly different, and they may or may not use social media differently, if at all. Overall, I suggest that constructions of parenthood should be investigated in a wider range of contexts in future research, to gain valuable insights into the options that are available to different parents in today's society.

Also, the demographic composition of participants in this study, with largely Malay and Muslim participants, aptly reflects the existing demographics of Malaysia as well as practical decisions made on my part. This narrow focus, however, points to the need for future studies which seek to replicate this study to employ more non-Muslims and non-Malays as participants to achieve a more even distribution of participants in terms of ethnicity and religion. Future studies can even consider employing more non-Muslims and non-Malays, compared to Malay-Muslims, if more insights on the ways identities are constructed in relation to ethnicity and religion are to be gained. On a related note, this study can be extended in other social settings for comparative cross-cultural studies, to see if the claims made in this research - that the 'good' mother identities of the participants are socioculturally constructed - are also applicable in other sociocultural settings.

I have argued in Chapter 3 that the narrow focus of this study, brought about by its in-depth qualitative approach, is regarded as a strength. Nonetheless, future studies in related fields could consider recruiting: (i) more participants if more representative findings are desired; or (ii) fewer participants to conduct a more in-depth analysis or case studies. Furthermore, for practical reasons that have been explicated in Chapter 3, this study had an unequal number of participants from the different career-role categories. If this study is to be extended and replicated, it would be ideal to have a more even distribution of participants in terms of careers, if more reliable comparisons are desired. In terms of recruitment methods, I would also suggest a more consistent and systematic method, rather than the eclectic nature of recruitment in this study. Nonetheless, I acknowledge that the combined purposive, snowball and random sampling methods have provided interesting insights into the ways identities are co-constructed between the participants and me as the researcher, considering that our different relationships impact on the participants' openness in expressing their beliefs and reported practices of motherhood.

8.4.4 Incorporating other themes and social factors

Since this study made a conscious decision to focus on the discourses of careers, ethnicity and religion – a decision that was made based on the inductive analysis of data - future studies could consider scrutinising other themes, such as social and familial relations, technology and social media. Future studies could also focus more narrowly on a few contested topics of motherhood that have been revealed in this study to capture many mothers' struggles and frustrations, such as breastfeeding, vaccination, and natural birth, to see how motherhood identities are constructed in relation to such highly debated issues. Scholars working in the fields of gender, parenthood, discourse, identity and digital communication are in a good position to take up this challenge. I encourage future researchers from diverse backgrounds to address the propositions presented in this chapter, and continue researching the complexities of identity construction through interdisciplinary approaches.

8.4.5 Employing alternative analytical approaches

Despite my confidence that the analytical framework employed in this study has assisted in the analysis and yields comprehensive findings as discussed in the previous chapter, this study clearly did not utilise all the concepts proposed by the respective scholars. For example, because of the inclusion of social media texts in this study, future studies that also wish to include digital communication could consider using specific analytic methods, such as multimodal (Georgakopoulou, 2013; Zappavigna & Zhao, 2017) and transmodal (Murphy, 2012) analysis. These approaches may enable more technical analysis in terms of the angle and positioning of audio-visual features in each digital post (e.g. locations of subjects and objects in a picture) as well as further investigation into the new mothers' constructions of various power relations. If the function of stories is to be incorporated in future studies, I would also suggest the use of narrative analysis to analyse such data (Baran, 2018; Georgakapoulou, 2013), to unpack the construction of identities through 'live' audio or audio-visual narratives.

In short, I encourage future studies to extend critical, self-reflexive and ethically-informed explorations of the ways motherhood identities are discursively constructed, to transform research in the fields of discourse, identity and parenthood.

8.5 Final remarks

I conclude this thesis by reiterating that paying attention to the intricate details underlying ordinary daily interactions among new mothers is vital, far beyond the Malaysian contexts studied in this study. Despite offering a snapshot of the processes of identity construction, this study has yielded valuable and intriguing insights into the discursive practices of motherhood and has captured a range of (mis)representations relating to traditional, dominant and emerging motherhood discourses. This study has significantly contributed to ongoing efforts to improve theoretical, analytical and methodological understandings of discursive identity construction, especially in relation to women who are new parents. It has also illuminated some possible social and academic interventions, and avenues for future research endeavours that can further enrich the vast interdisciplinary scholarship of applied linguistics, identity, digital communication and parenthood.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Letters of informed consent

Letter of Informed Consent (Interview/s)

Title of Research*: Motherhood Discourses in Malaysia.*

S1.74 Social Sciences Building,
The University of Warwick
Coventry, CV4 7AL, United Kingdom

Date: ……

Dear Ms/Mrs ……..,

My name is Norazrin Zamri, and I am a Ph.D. candidate at The University of Warwick. I am currently doing research on motherhood discourses among new mothers in Malaysia.

The aim of this study is to understand the feelings, beliefs and experiences of Malaysian new mothers from a linguistic perspective. Your contribution to this research study is meaningful to this research, the academic world and the general public and, therefore, highly appreciated.

You are kindly invited to participate in this research. This will involve an interview with me at a time and place that is convenient to you. The interview lasts roughly 1 hour to 2 hours, and you will be interviewed regarding your motherhood experiences, beliefs, and associated feelings. No prior preparation is necessary. Your responses will be audio-recorded, transcribed, analysed and published only for the purpose/s related to this research.

When analysing your interview, your name and anyone else's real names mentioned will be replaced with pseudonyms and identification codes on all records. You and the people mentioned, thus, will not be identifiable by others. The data for this study will be securely kept by me and by my main supervisor – in her locked cabinet. Only my research supervisors and I will have access to them. Your privacy, confidentiality and anonymity will always be protected.

By signing a copy of this letter you agree to participate in this research. Your participation is very important but entirely voluntary. You have the right to not participate or withdraw at any point – even after signing this letter – without being penalised.

If you have concerns or questions about this study, please contact me (+447576159954/+60174292008, N.Zamri@warwick.ac.uk) and/or my research supervisors: Dr Stephanie Schnurr (+442476151092, S.Schnurr@warwick.ac.uk); Dr Malcolm N. Macdonald (+442476524250, M.N.MacDonald@warwick.ac.uk).

Thank you,

Norazrin Zamri
Ph.D. Candidate,
Centre for Applied Linguistics, The University of Warwick

By signing this form, I agree to participate in this study as outlined above.

_____
(Signature)

Name: …… Date: ……..

Letter of Informed Consent (Facebook and/or Instagram – Selected Participants)

Title of Research*: Motherhood Discourses in Malaysia.*

S1.74 Social Sciences Building,
The University of Warwick
Coventry, CV4 7AL, United Kingdom

Date: ……

Dear Ms/Mrs ……..,

My name is Norazrin Zamri, and I am a Ph.D. candidate at The University of Warwick. I am currently doing research on motherhood discourses among new mothers in Malaysia.

The aim of this study is to understand the feelings, beliefs and experiences of Malaysian new mothers from a linguistic perspective. Your contribution to this research study is meaningful to this research, the academic world and the general public and, therefore, highly appreciated.

You are kindly invited to participate in this research. In this part of the research, I would like to look at your Facebook and/or Instagram posts for the past six months. You will not need to do anything and no prior preparation is necessary.

When analysing your posts, your real name and Facebook and/or Instagram user name/s, as well as anyone else's real name/s and Facebook and/or Instagram user name/s that appear on the posts, will be replaced with pseudonyms. All your pictures and/or videos will be blurred so that people's real identities will be protected. Pseudonyms and identification codes will be used on all records. You and the people mentioned, thus, will not be identifiable by others. The data for this study will be securely kept by me and by my main supervisor – in her locked cabinet. Only my research supervisors and I will have access to them. Your privacy, confidentiality and anonymity will always be protected.

By signing a copy of this letter you agree to participate in this research. Your participation is very important but entirely voluntary. You have the right to not participate or withdraw at any point – even after signing this letter – without being penalised. You can also choose to let me access only selected Facebook and/or Instagram posts.

If you have concerns or questions about this study, please contact me (+447576159954/+60174292008, N.Zamri@warwick.ac.uk) and/or my research supervisors: Dr Stephanie Schnurr (+442476151092, S.Schnurr@warwick.ac.uk); Dr Malcolm N. Macdonald (+442476524250, M.N.MacDonald@warwick.ac.uk).

Thank you,

Norazrin Zamri
Ph.D. Candidate,
Centre for Applied Linguistics, The University of Warwick

By signing this form, I agree to participate in this study as outlined above.

_____
(Signature)

Name: …… Date: ……..

Appendix 2. Interview guide

❖ Greetings

❖ CONSENT form

❖ CONSENT to record:

Would you mind if I record this interview?

❖ Clarify MY ROLE:

Just to inform you that this is not a formal interview. It's a conversational one. My role is more of a listener as my interest is on your stories and opinions. No judgments and no right/wrong/expected answers. So please share with me your truest feelings and thoughts. But feel free to ask any questions if you are unsure about anything.

❖ PURPOSE of the research:

I'd like you to know that you're being interviewed because I want to understand a bit better the experiences of new-age new Malaysian mothers. This is because there have been a lot of issues (positive & negative) among new mothers, especially in today's technological age.

❖ LANGUAGE

Do you prefer this interview to be conducted in English or Malay language?

❖ BREAK THE ICE:

Tell me a little bit about yourself.

A: BASIC MOTHERING EXPERIENCES

1. Could you tell me a bit about your **children**?
    a. How many do you have? How old is he/she / are they? Where was he/she / were they born?
    b. Sorry if I may ask, after the marriage, did you actually plan the pregnancy/ies or perhaps your child/ren was/were unplanned?

2. What would you say are the **best things** about being a mother?
    a. Can you give me a situation as an example?

3. Are there also some other things that you perceive as less positive, perhaps as a **challenge**?
    a. Can you give me a situation as an example?

4. Could you please share with me, as vividly as possible, how was the situation like when you **gave birth** to your first baby, your thoughts and feelings at that time?
    a. Did you expect those things to happen and for you to think and feel that way?

5. How did you find your **first year** as a mother?
    a. Could you share a situation that illustrates what you've said?
    b. Has anything changed since then?
        i. Could you give an example of how your motherhood experiences have changed since then?

B: SUPPORT SYSTEM

6. Do you feel that you have enough **support** from people around you (perhaps your husband/family/friends) throughout your mothering journey?
    a. Could you give me an example of how these people have been supportive/unsupportive to you?
    b. Do you wish that they are more supportive than they currently are? In what ways?

C: DEFINITION OF A GOOD / BAD MOTHER:

7. What do you think makes a **good mother**?
    a. Where/How do you get these ideas?
    b. Do you feel that you have all the qualities you have just said?
        i. Can you give an example when you feel that you have been a "good" or a "bad" mother?
        ii. How do you see yourself compared to other mothers you know?
    c. *How do you see you being a WM/WAHM/SAHM play a role in this?
    d. Would you consider becoming a WM/WAHM/SAHM?
    e. Do you know of anyone who you would describe as a good mother?
        i. If yes- Does she match all the criteria you have mentioned?
        ii. Why not/how?
        iii. Can you give an example?

8. How do you think the **Malaysian society** defines a "good" mother?
    a. What makes you think so?
    b. Can you give an example?

D: VALIDATION / JUDGMENTS

9. Have you ever felt **validated/judged** by others about being a "good"/"bad" mother?
    a. Can you give me an example of when that happened to you?
    b. How do you respond to such validation/judgment?
    c. Do you think the validation/judgments have anything to do with the society's definition of a good mother?
        i. In what ways do you think that is done?

E: RECENT MOTHERHOOD TRENDS/BELIEFS

10. What do you think of the **new motherhood emphasis/styles/trends** (like breastfeeding, babywearing, home birth, etc) among many new Malaysian mothers these days?
    a. Why do you say so?
    b. Would you say you are one of them too?
        ii. Can you give an example that shows you have experienced the new motherhood trends?
        iii. Why do you do that?
    c. You mentioned that the Malaysian society defines a good mother as _____, so how do you feel these new mothering trends match with that view? Parallel/Opposing?

11. How do you **respond** to these "new trends" that depict how/what a "good" mother should be and/do? (What do you do about them?)
    a. Could you share a situation when/where this happened?

F: THE USE OF FACEBOOK AND/OR INSTAGRAM

12. I notice that you have a Facebook and/or Instagram account, **how have you been using it** since becoming a mother?
    a. Do you also use it to talk about being a mother?
        i. How do you do that? Can you give an example?
        ii. Why do you think you do that?
        iii. Do your friends' posts on Facebook and/or Instagram help you in getting such support and information too?

    b. Do you use other forms of social media or websites for the same purposes/s and/or different?
        i. Can you give some examples of how you use them?

13. For all the mothering things you have shared with me so far, would you also **share them on your Facebook and/or Instagram**? Or would you share more/less?
    a. How often?
    b. Why do you post such posts?
    c. What effect does it have on you as a mother?
    d. You said earlier that you felt validated/judged by others, does this happen to you on Facebook and/or Instagram too?
14. Have you ever consciously/unconsciously wanted to **project the idea that you are a "good" mother** on your Facebook and/or Instagram page?
    a. Why did you / didn't you want to do that?
        i. If you did, how have you done it?

15. **Relating to the new mothering trends we discussed earlier, do you realise that there are many of such trends being promoted via several support groups on Facebook? (show pics)
    a. Are you a member of any of these groups?
        i. What kinds of things do you communicate or share about there?
        ii. Could you please give an example of things you ask/share in such a group?
        iii. Why do you think you/others do that?
    b. What is your opinion about such motherhood (support) groups on Facebook in terms of their rationale and impact?

16. Do you think your motherhood-related posts on Facebook and/or Instagram **reflect** the way you embrace/reject **your own and/or the Malaysian society's ideas** about what makes a "good" mother?
    a. If yes, how are they done?

G: REFLECTION OF ONESELF AS A MOTHER

17. How do you **describe the kind of mother** you are?

18. Are you striving to become a **"better" mother** in the future?
    a. Why?
    b. In what ways?

19. If there were three things that you could **tell women who are about to become a mother**, what would they be?

- Would you be OK for me to look at your Facebook and/or Instagram posts?
- Would you mind if I invite you for another interview, together with other new mothers in the future?

Appendix 3. List of codings for interviews from NVivo

Emerging codes according to frequency of occurrences (references)
[As of February 25, 2019]

Themes & Sub-themes	References	Sources
F. JUDGMENT AND VIEWS	**1787**	**19**
f01. 'Good' mother (definition)	451	19
f01(k). prioritising child(ren)'s best interest	114	19
f01(a). trying to be a 'good' mother	102	17
f01(l). spending time with child(ren)	48	11
f01(b). portraying oneself as not a 'good' mother	47	11
f01(j). attending to chil(ren)'s needs	21	7
f01(q). being patient	19	4
f01(t). productivity	12	4
f01(s). not too much restriction	11	1
f01(p). teaching child(ren) skills	9	5
f01(e). having happy child(ren)	9	4
f01(h). supportiveness	7	3
f01(m). children management skills	7	3
f01(o). providing material comfort to child(ren)	6	5
f01(l). less judgment	6	3
f01(n). sincerity	6	1
f01(u). cooking	5	3
f01(f). protectiveness	4	3
f01(d). listening	4	3
f01(c). inexistence of 'good mother' definition	4	2
f01(g). responsibility	4	2
f01(r). lovingness	3	2
f01(i). spirituality	2	1
f01(v). discipline	1	1
f05. Self VS others	345	19
f02. Judgment	170	19
f03. Feeling judged	153	19
f14. Validation	108	19
f04. Not passing judgments	71	11
f08. Disregarding others' judgment	67	16
f20. Despising 'extremism'	62	14
f21. Societal pressure	48	18
f10. Avoiding conflicts	47	16
f07. Defensiveness	42	11
f19. Despising judgment	42	10
f09. Reservation	34	9
f06. Apprehension of others' perceptions	32	8
f17. Contradictory mothering practices	26	10
f11. Explanation	24	14
f18. Not pressuring or imposing ideas on others	15	8
f13. Acceptance	12	7
f22. Societal biased judgment	12	5
f23. Decisions dependent on societal judgment	9	5
f25. Curiosity	8	3
f15. Validation for one's personal achievements	3	1
f24. Modern perspective	3	3
f12. Sarcasm	2	1
f16. Exhibiting kids' abilities	1	1
E. CHANGES	**1754**	**19**
e04. Before VS after	334	19
e06. Motherliness	277	19
e06(a). mother	32	17
e06(l). planned pregnancy	27	13
e06(b). motherliness	26	8
e06(r). children = mothers' abilities	22	9
e06(j). family planning	22	6
e06(q). moms know best	19	8
e06(e). emotion	18	5
e06(f). sentimentality	18	9
e06(d). initial unmotherliness	18	6
e06(i). readiness for motherhood	18	9
e06(k). uplanned pregnancy	17	11
e06(c). unmotherliness	12	6

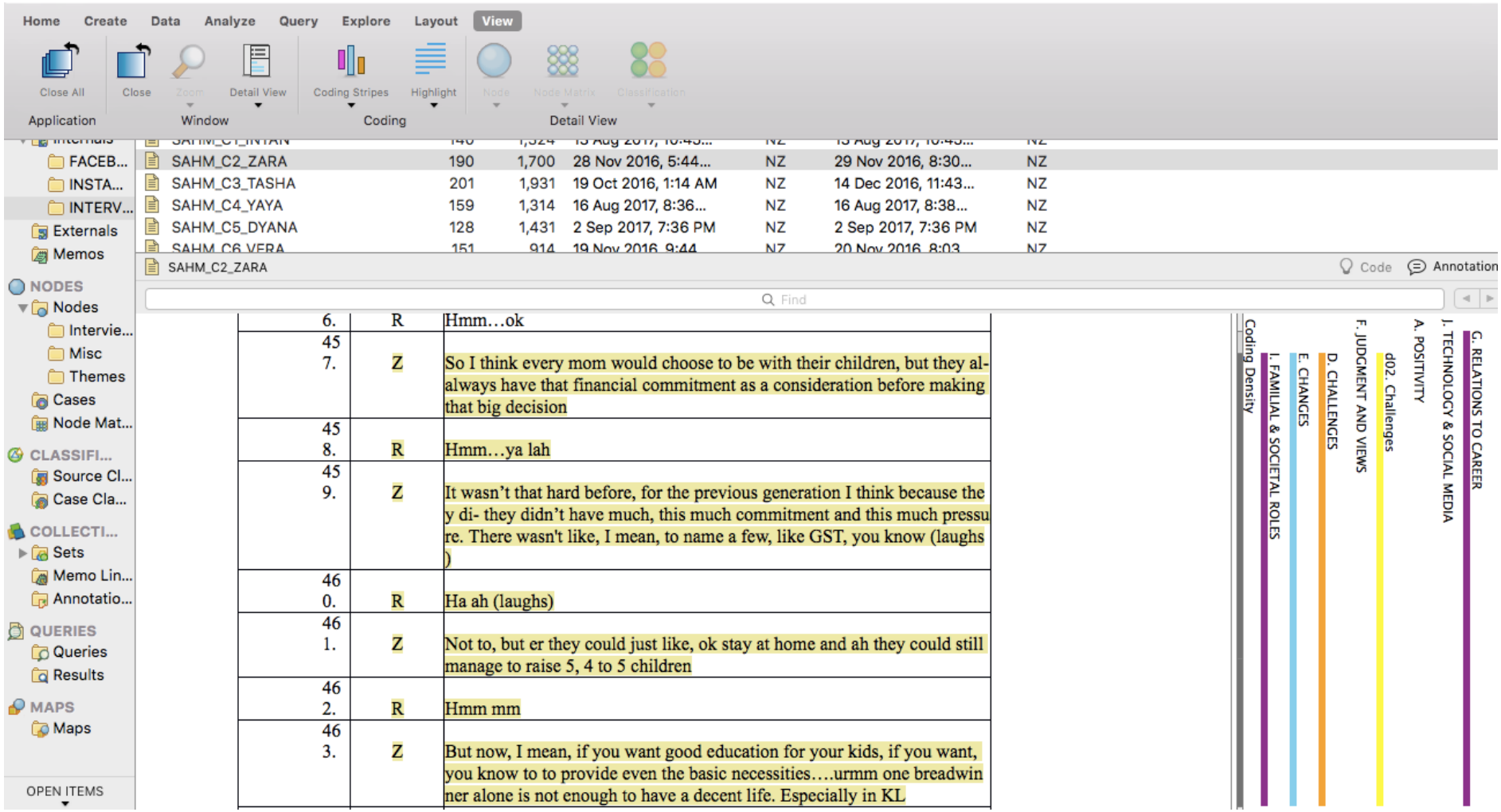
e06(p). a mother's impact	10	6
e06(o). unconventionality	7	1
e06(m). maturity	3	1
e06(g). possessiveness	3	3
e06(h). domesticity	2	1
e06(n). irreversible mother role	1	1
e26. Improvement	216	18
e26(a). improvement	126	18
e26(d). reading behaviour	43	11
e26(b). trying her best	31	12
e26(c). done her best	6	3
e26(e). becoming more religious	3	1
e22. Flexibility & convenience	186	19
e22(b). practicality	54	10
e22(c). the need for breaks	32	9
e22(e). babywearing	27	10
e22(a). flexibility	15	4
e22(d). cost-effectiveness	6	1
e24. Trends	161	18
e24(a). trying out trends	67	11
e24(b). disregarding recent trends	16	9
e01. (In)experience	97	16
e02. Adaptation	83	12
e05. Now VS then	71	15
e21. Conflicting identities or interests	62	13
e03. Total lifestyle change	56	14
e23. Social life	45	15
e23(d). ME time	14	10
e23(a). lesser social life	7	3
e23(b). more social life	3	1
e23(c). similar social life	1	1
e07. Selflessness	28	11
e08. Sacrifice	23	11
e09. Shock	16	8
e15. Role as wife	16	8
e12. Mother = child	10	8
e14. More appreciation for parents	10	6
e13. Newfound interests	10	6
e17. Maintaining 'old' self	10	3
e25. Glamour	9	2
e16. Missing old self	9	3
e19. Reliving old self	9	4
e10. Emptiness	6	1
e20. Preference for current self	4	3
e18. Losing oneself	4	2
e11. Changing parenting styles	2	1
D. CHALLENGES	**1640**	**19**
d02. Challenges	453	19
d01. Negativity	376	19
d01(a). not doing the 'right' thing as a mother	60	16
d01(k). questioning mother	57	17
d01(h). worry	55	15
d01(i). scepticism	43	12
d01(f). guilt	38	14
d01(d). anger	28	10
d01(b). sadness	27	14
d01(g). fear	16	7
d01(c). depression	16	6
d01(p). boredom	6	2
d01(o). laziness	6	3
d01(e). selfishness	6	2
d01(m). challenging others	5	2
d01(l). venting	5	1
d01(j). dissatisfaction	3	3
d01(r). giving up	2	2
d01(q). uselessness	2	2
d01(n). demotivation	1	1
d22. Reality VS expectation	121	17
d21. Ambivalence	108	19
d03. Struggle	78	15
d24. Compromise	65	17

d15. Labour complications	53	11
d09. Trial and error	46	11
d08. Exhaustion	46	13
d19. Time management	42	12
d17. Confinement challenges	39	12
d16. Post-partum recovery and changes	34	12
d14. Pregnancy challenges	31	9
d18. Sleeping issues	26	11
d05. Multiple tasks	24	7
d13. Conceiving issues	23	7
d04. Overwhelmingness	16	8
d20. Challenges are normal	13	4
d07. Confusion	12	5
d11. Loneliness	8	5
d10. Failure	8	4
d23. A mother to boy(s)	7	3
d06. Helplessness	5	3
d12. Dependence	5	3
I. FAMILIAL & SOCIETAL ROLES	**1597**	**19**
i07. Husband's support	141	19
i01. Own VS family or society	124	16
i18. Parents as source of support	84	14
i05. Effects of familial, societal norms or expectations	81	13
i27. Friends' support	77	19
i31. Fellow mothers' support	74	16
i36. Lack of support	72	13
i03. Societal support	63	16
i02. Older generation VS current generation	63	16
i24. Issues with in-laws	58	6
i14. Shared parenting	55	9
i25. Other family members' support	50	13
i08. Husband's roles in childcare	48	18
i23. Parent-in-laws as source of support	46	13
i34. Finding support or information from readings	45	13
i09. Relationship with husband	44	13
i35. Reference to medical authority	41	14
i30. Sharing motherhood experiences	39	11
i17. Parents as role models	38	12
i37. Seeking help	33	12
i46. External childcare support	32	9
i28. Friends as role model	24	7
i16. Own mother as the 'good mother'	24	9
i13. Gendered parenting	21	7
i42. Matching judgments-societal expectations	20	12
i32. Mothers VS non-mothers	19	8
i44. Matching societal expectation-trends	18	12
i20. Learning from parents' mistakes	18	6
i22. Parent-in-laws as role models	15	3
i39. Rejection of outsiders' help for childcare.	15	5
i06. Collaborative decision-making	14	6
i41. Mismatch own-society beliefs	12	9
i21. Mother-in-law as the 'good mother'	11	3
i33. Colleagues' support	10	5
i15. Own child(ren)'s support	9	4
i19. Issues with parents	8	6
i26. Maintaining family ties	8	5
i40. Matching own-society beliefs	6	4
i10. Father-child(ren) relationship	5	3
i37. Feeling neglected	5	3
i04. Social relationships	5	1
i12. Restrictions from husband	4	2
i38. Accepting societal advice	4	3
i47. Grandparents as role models	4	1
i29. Lost friendships	3	2
i45. Family members as role models	3	3
i11. Mom VS dad	3	2
i43. Mismatch judgments-societal expectations	1	1
A. POSITIVITY	**1445**	**19**
a02. Doing the 'right' thing as a mother	527	19
a03. Happiness	189	19
a18. Agency	115	17

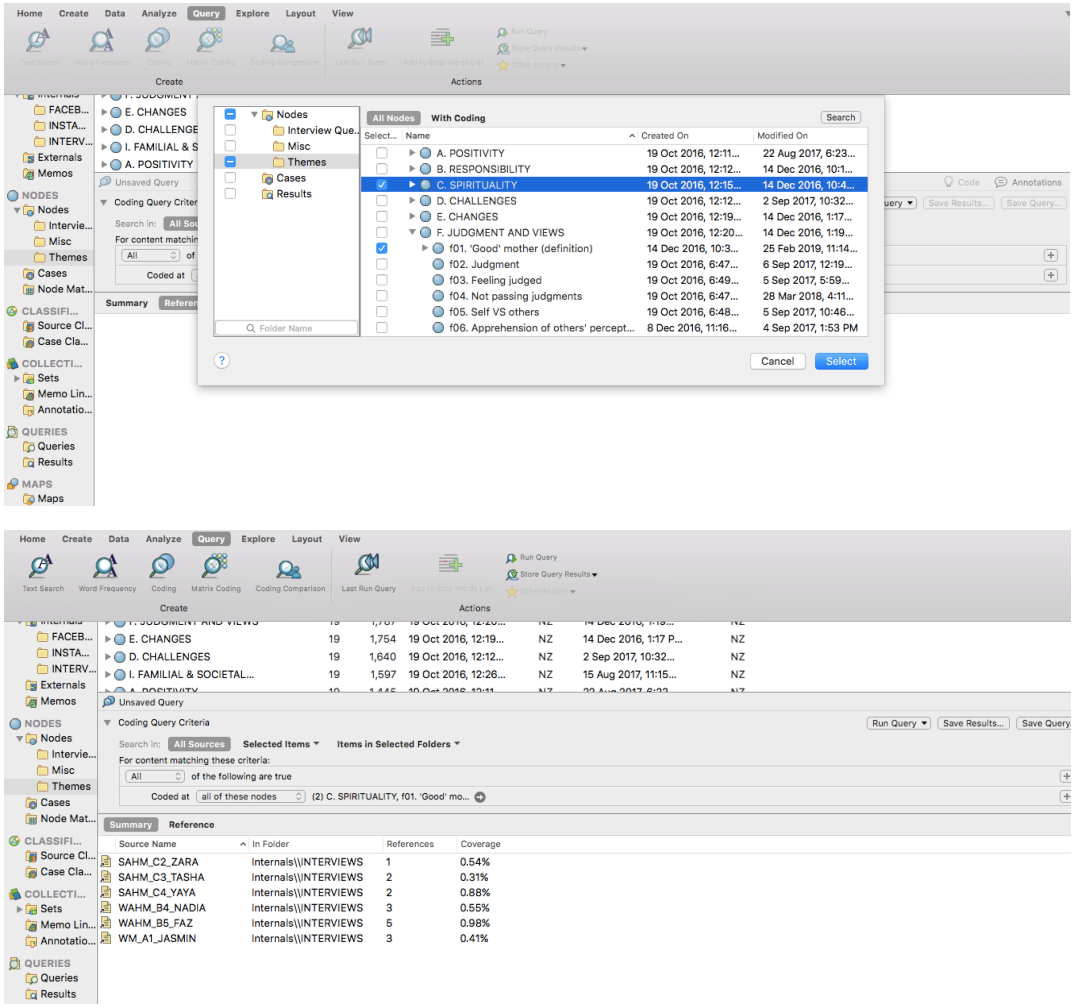
a09. Gratefulness	78	16
a29. Balance	43	11
a12. Carefulness	42	11
a05. Lovingness	34	13
a01. Positivity	33	10
a24. Calmness	32	8
a14. Funniness	31	7
a30. Unproblematicness	31	9
a35. Empathy	27	12
a19. Independence	24	9
a25. Patience	24	10
a34. Supportiveness	23	9
a10. Pride	21	6
a11. Accomplishment	18	10
a07. Devotion	17	4
a23. Reflectiveness	14	4
a28. Respect	14	6
a16. Giving opportunities to child(ren)	13	5
a37. Normality	10	8
a04. Content	9	6
a08. Caring	9	6
a40. Amazement	8	4
a32. Transparency	7	2
a20. Confidence	7	3
a27. Modesty	6	2
a21. Survival	5	3
a38. Unloneliness	5	2
a22. Sanity	4	3
a13. Fun	4	2
a42. Sensibleness	4	1
a36. Self-awareness	3	2
a33. Release	2	2
a26. Forgiveness	2	1
a06. Passion	2	2
a17. Strength	2	1
a15. Creativity	2	2
a31. Realist	2	2
a41. Adventure	1	1
a39. Innovativeness	1	1
J. TECHNOLOGY & SOCIAL MEDIA	**1160**	**19**
j09. Sharing culture on social media	223	17
j17. Active social media user	221	17
j08. Social media for information or support	215	19
j05. Online pressures	103	15
j02. Obtaining information and support online	73	18
j10. Not sharing everything on social media	68	14
j18. Less active social media user	56	12
j06. Facebook VS Instagram	33	12
j15. Social media posts = beliefs	33	15
j21. Use of electronic devices	24	9
j20. Posts online for others	22	8
j07. Love for social media	13	6
j11. Openness on social media = reality	12	9
j16. Offline VS online persona	11	4
j19. Dislike for other mothers' posts	10	5
j01. Love for technology	9	6
j14. Depicting motherhood realities through social media	9	4
j03. Maintaining connections online	7	5
j04. Dependence on the Internet	5	4
j13. Filtering social media network	3	1
j12. 'Freedom of speech' on social media	3	2
j22. The love for online games	3	1
G. RELATIONS TO CAREER	**791**	**19**
g01. Working (WM)	130	13
g02. Work-at-home (WAHM)	117	8
g11. Changing career roles	94	15
g03. Stay-at-home (SAHM)	90	12
g13. Career roles-beliefs-'good' mother	86	17
g10. Career-choice judgments	79	14
g05. Child(ren) and work decisions	48	13
g06. Effects of work on mothering	36	12

g07. Work for money	25	8
g04. Student (SM)	20	5
g08. Happiness as a SAHM	18	6
g09. Challenges of a SAHM	13	4
g14. 'Mommy battle'	9	3
g12. Acknowledging other mothers' challenges	9	6
B. RESPONSIBILITY	**643**	**19**
b13. Feeding	272	19
b13(a). breastfeeding	188	19
b13(d). cooking mother	26	10
b13(c). mixed-feeding	20	7
b13(b). formula-feeding	19	6
b13(f). feeding affects child(ren)'s behaviour	3	1
b13(e). solid food issues	2	2
b14. Future-related	59	14
b14(a). future plans	18	8
b14(b). visioning child(ren)'s future	16	6
b14(c). result-orientation	7	2
b14(d). friendly parent-child relationship	7	3
b14(f). child(ren)'s future perception on parents	6	2
b14(e). normal life for child(ren)	1	1
b02. Protectiveness	56	14
b07. Importance of spending time	54	13
b05. Child(ren)'s development	37	11
b03. Strictness	37	9
b08. Well-informedness	31	9
b01. Responsibility	25	12
b06. Importance of food	25	3
b09. Well-preparation	21	11
b04. Persistence	18	6
b10. Children = valuable asset	3	2
b12. Importance on child(ren)'s looks	3	1
b11. Setting good example	2	2
H. ETHNICITY & CULTURE	**174**	**18**
h03. Malaysian distinct culture	48	11
h04. Malaysian 'good mother' ideals	41	12
h01. Identifying to particular ethnic groups	17	5
h07. Traditions VS Modernity	14	6
h05. Tradition	9	4
h06. Traditional + modern elements	9	5
h10. 'Western' culture influence	6	4
h13. Belief in unseen evil powers	5	3
h12. Mix of cultures	4	2
h09. A Malay	3	1
h02. Maintaining native rights	2	2
h08. Asian mothering mentality	2	1
h14. Belief in 'feng shui'	1	1
C. SPIRITUALITY	**141**	**14**
c02. Religion in mothering	94	12
c03. Moral or religious values for child(ren)	25	8
c05. Practising Muslim	11	4
c01. Spirituality	8	2
c04. Becoming more religious	3	1

Appendix 4. A Sample of inductive coding for interviews from NVivo



Appendix 5. A screenshot of how data with intersecting themes are chosen on Nvivo



Appendix 6. Operationalised definitions of selected themes and sub-themes

Major themes	Definitions & brief explanations
1. Judgment and views	▪ How the participants view and/or judge themselves as a mother and other people (mothers and non-mothers) as well as how others (mothers and non-mothers) judge them as a mother.
2. Changes	▪ Any aspects related to changes the new mothers experienced after becoming a mother.
3. Familial and societal roles	▪ When the new mothers talked about their identities in relation to others around them, from spouses, immediate family members, other relatives, friends, colleagues to strangers.
4. Challenges	▪ All explicitly and implicitly challenging aspects of motherhood shared.
5. Positivity	▪ The new mothers' positive feelings about their motherhood experiences.
6. Technology and social media	▪ Technology here refers to more general use of the Internet such as websites, cell phones, applications, tablets, etc whilst social media is more specific to the new mothers' reference to web 2.0 sites, particularly Facebook and Instagram.
7. Relations to career	▪ Career-related aspects of the mother, whether they were working, work-at-home, or staying at home.
8. Responsibility	▪ When the new mothers expressed the things that they should/must/were expected to do as a mother.
9. Ethnicity & Culture	▪ Context-specific (Malaysian) narratives that were related to the mothers' ethnicities and cultures.
10. Spirituality	▪ When the new mothers talked about the role of moral values/religion in their motherhood experiences.

Appendix 7. A sample of deductive coding for Facebook posts (major themes)

No.	*POSTS' LABELS*	*A. POSITIVITY*	*B. RESPONSIBILITY*	*C. SPIRITUALITY*	*D. CHALLENGES*	*E. CHANGES*	*F. JUDGMENT & VIEWS*	*G. CAREER-RELATED*	*H. ETHNICITY, CULTURE*	*I. FAMILIAL & SOC. ROLES*	*J. TECHNOLOGY & S. MEDIA*
WM											
A1-JASMIN											
1.	FB_A1_1	*	*		*			*		*	
2.	FB_A1_2	*	*		*						
3.	FB_A1_3	*	*						*		
4.	FB_A1_4	*	*								
5.	FB_A1_5	*	*		*						
6.	FB_A1_6	*	*								
7.	FB_A1_7	*	*	*				*			
8.	FB_A1_8	*	*					*			
9.	FB_A1_9	*	*						*		
10.	FB_A1_10			*	*						
11.	FB_A1_11	*			*					*	
12.	FB_A1_12	*	*		*						
13.	FB_BA1_13			*	*					*	
14.	FB_A1_14	*								*	
15.	FB_A1_15	*		*	*					*	
16.	FB_A1_16				*		*	*		*	
17.	FB_A1_17	*		*	*	*		*			
18.	FB_A1_18		*		*					*	
19.	FB_A1_19	*	*								
20.	FB_A1_20		*		*					*	
21.	FB_A1_21	*						*			
22.	FB_A1_22		*		*						*
23.	FB_A1_23	*	*	*	*	*		*		*	
24.	FB_A1_24		*		*			*		*	
25.	FB_A1_25		*	*	*						

Appendix 8. A sample of deductive coding for Instagram posts (major themes)

No.	*POSTS' LABELS*	*A. POSITIVITY*	*B. RESPONSIBILITY*	*C. SPIRITUALITY*	*D. CHALLENGES*	*E. CHANGES*	*F. JUDGMENT & VIEWS*	*G. CAREER-RELATED*	*H. ETHNICITY, CULTURE*	*I. FAMILIAL & SOC. ROLES*	*J. TECHNOLOGY & S. MEDIA*
WM											
A1-JASMIN											
1.	IG_A1_1	*	*					*			
2.	IG_A1_2	*								*	
3.	IG_A1_3	*	*					*			
4.	IG_A1_4	*	*								
A2-LIPPY MORGAN											
PERMISSION NOT GIVEN											
A3-KIRAN											
N/A											
A4-CATHY											
N/A											
A5-HANA											
5.	IG_A5_1	*				*					
6.	IG_A5_2	*									
7.	IG_A5_3	*									
8.	IG_A5_4	*	*								
9.	IG_A5_5	*									
10.	IG_A5_6	*									
11.	IG_A5_7	*		*					*		
12.	IG_A5_8	*									
13.	IG_A5_9	*	*								
14.	IG_A5_10	*								*	
15.	IG_A5_11	*								*	
16.	IG_A5_12	*								*	
17.	IG_A5_13	*									

Appendix 9. Additional supporting excerpt

Zara:

(support for analysis of Post 4.1)

Turn	Speaker	Transcript
23-33	Z	So it's much easier much more flexible, the pay is equally good as full time because they pay per per shift, er the more I read the more I get *lah*. So if I don't read at all in a month like for the past few months, then er nothing *lah*, but at least er there's something. Then I also have my craft business, which I started during my study days. So I er dulu I buat macam handmade bags and all *[So I er used to make like handbag bags and all]*. When when I had a baby, erm it evolved into a baby stuff punya *[…into a baby stuff's (business)]* (little laugh). I made clothes, (unintelligible word) stuffed toys. So er it was er ok on going, until I got pregnant again. Err because it was a pretty, macam *[like]* a bit too handful, with a very active toddler